

The Harvest of



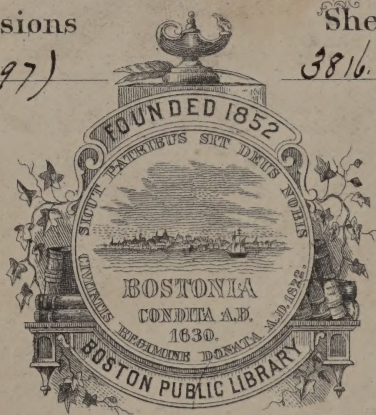
A Quiet Eye.

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The Harbest of a Quiet Eye.

With Numerous Illustrations by
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and other eminent Artists.



‘Bare ruined choirs.’

THE HARVEST OF A QUIET EYE.

LEISURE THOUGHTS

FOR

BUSY LIVES.

BY

THE REV. I. R. VERNON, M.A.,

*Author of 'Random Truths in Common Things;' 'Ingleside and
Wayside Musings,' etc.*

Be this my work, 'a grotto bright and clear
From stain or taint, in which the blameless mind
May feed on thoughts though pensive not austere;
—Or, if the pensive spirit be inclined
To holy musing, it may enter here.'

WORDSWORTH.

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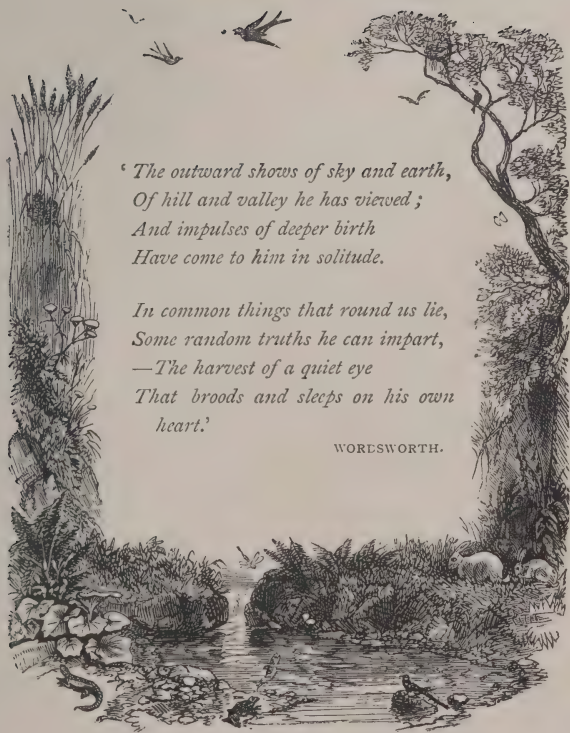
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Apr. 10, 1891.



*'The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley he has viewed ;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.*

*In common things that round us lie,
Some random truths he can impart,
—The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own
heart.'*

WORDSWORTH.



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THESE papers, written in the intervals of parish work, have appeared in the pages of the *Leisure Hour* and the *Sunday at Home*. Their publication in a collected form having been decided upon by others, it only remained for me, by careful revision and excision, to render them as little unworthy as might be of starting for themselves in the wide world.

I shall not say that I am sorry that they are thus sent forth on their humble mission. Indeed, I am glad. 'Brief life is here our portion':—and surely the wish is one natural to all earnest hearts, that our work for the Master in this sad and sinful world should not have its term together with the

quick ending of our short day's labour here:—and a book has the possibility of a longer life than that of a man. The Night cometh, when none can work; how sweet, if it might be, that when the day is ended, when the warfare, for us, is over, we may have left some strong watchwords, or some comfortable and cheering utterances, still ringing in the ears of those who stepped into our place in the unbroken ranks.

Yes, the evening soon falls on the field; the day is brief, nor fully employed; inanimate things seem to have an advantage over us; streams flow on, and mountains stand;

‘While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
We men, who, in our morn of youth, defied
The elements, must vanish:—be it so!
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour.’

And I may be permitted to hope that possibly these meditations may have such power and perform such service, in their modest way. They have but the ambition of a flower that looks up to cheer, or a bird's note that tranquilly, amid storms, continues a simple melody from the heart of its tree. They will, like these, be easily passed by, but, like these, may have a message for hearts that will look and listen.

There is certainly, in the present age, a want of writing that shall rest and brace the mind; of meditative writing of a tendency merely holy and practical, rather shunning than plunging into controversy:—not the cry of the angry or startled bird,

but its evening and morning orisons rather. A contemplative strain; one linked with things of earth, and hallowing them—one heard beside ‘the common path that common men pursue’ :—one rising from the trivial and monotonous work-a-day experiences, joys, and pains—rising from these and carrying them up with it heavenward, until even earth’s exhalations catch the light of an unearthly glory. We want more of this spiritual rest; more of this standing apart from the perturbations of the day; more of retirement and retired thought—thought that shall leave the throng, with its absorbed purpose and its pushing and jostling, always eager, often angry; and having secured a lonely standing-point apart from it all, become better able to judge of the real truth and importance, also of the just relation of things.

I cannot claim to have done more than make a slight attempt towards the supply of this want. Nay, I would rather lay claim not to have *attempted*. This is the age of effort and strain; it were well that thought were sometimes permitted to be natural, spontaneous, and simply expressive of that which the heart’s meditations have laid by in store. A stream thus welling up will want the precision and the single aim of the artificial jet, but it will have its modest use and value to cheer and to refresh lowly grasses, and perhaps to water the roots of loftier growths in its vagaries and meanderings.

In these times men will be held nothing if not controversial;

and rival parties will skim the book for shibboleths before they read or throw it by. Assuredly fixed principles and definite teaching are (if ever at one time more than another) of special importance in the present day; and I am not one who think it well to blow both hot and cold at pleasure. Only I would ask, is there absolute need that we be *always blowing* either? may we not sometimes be permitted simply to breathe? There are occasions on which I find myself compelled to blow one or the other, but I grudge the good breath spent in the exertion, and prefer to return to the normal state of even respiration. A story, told of Archbishop Leighton's youth, is to the point:—"In a synod he was publicly reprimanded for not "preaching up the times." "Who," he asked, "does preach up the times?" It was answered that all the brethren did it. "Then," he rejoined, "if all of you preach up the times, you may surely allow one poor brother to preach up Christ Jesus and Eternity."

No doubt, we must be militant here on earth, militant against every form of error—old error undisguised, and old error in a new dress; but the more need that we should secure breathing times when we may sheathe the biting sword and lay the heavy armour by. Perhaps many with whom we war, or from whom we stand aloof in suspicion, would be found, when the vizors were raised, to be brothers, and henceforth warriors by our side.

One word as to the title of this book. 'The Harvest of a Quiet Eye.' This has always been a favourite line with me, and now I take it to describe my unpretentious volume, though this be rather a handful gleaned than a harvest got in. With some people this gleaning by the way would be contemned, in their single-eyed advance upon some goal; with some it is a thing continual and habitual, this instinctive gathering and half-unconscious storing of hints and touches of wayside beauty—a process so well described in Wordsworth's verses. To have an eye for the wide pictures and slight studies of Nature; to gather them up, in solitary walks which thus are not lonely; to lay them by, together with the heart's deeper thoughts, its associations, meditations, and reminiscences;—this is to fashion common things into a beauty which, to the fashioner at least, may be a joy for ever.

'To see the heath-flower withered on the hill,
To listen to the woods' expiring lay,
To note the red leaf shivering on the spray,
To mark the last bright tints the mountain stain,
On the waste fields to trace the gleaner's way,
And moralise on mortal joy and pain,'

—this has been with me the secondary occupation of many a walk, solitary or in company. A rosy sunbeam slanting down a bank, and catching the stems of the ferns and the tops of the grasses; a coral twist of briony berries; a daisy in December;—the eye would be caught, and the train of grave

or anxious musing intermitted without being broken off, by the ever-allowed claim of Nature's silent poetry. And often the deeper meaning of such poetry would run parallel with the mind's thought—sometimes suggest for it a new path.

‘Few ears of scattered grain.’ Though this be all my harvest, yet if that be grain at all which has been collected, it may have its use. He who, with a very little, fed a great multitude, has a ministry for even our humble handfuls. At His feet be this laid: may He accept and bless it, and deign to refresh and hearten by its means some few at least of those who, faint and weary, are following Him in the wilderness of this world!



THE OLD YEAR AND THE NEW.

WHEN service is spoken of, it is not with the notion that the New Year must needs propose to us some great thing. He that waits for some great thing is, too likely, only anxious to be thought of as some great one. The year will often bring tasks in one hand, and honours in the other. But much that is most honourable must be achieved in sedulous quiet. Only let us advance in the kingdom as well as towards it, not being content with being just in. Feebly burning lamps are of small use in so dark a world. A feebly uttered call, a feebly attractive love, will not suffice. If the Kingdom of God, in its utmost glory, is still a kingdom very far off, from that kingdom as it now is, and is with us, how very far off many wanderers are. Far off in woes and sins, and earthly-mindedness, millions still are. What depth of meaning is there in the words, 'brought nigh by the blood of Christ!'

T. T. LYNCH.



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Words repeated by how many myriads, in how many zones—tropic, temperate, frigid, wherever the English tongue is spoken! Words said commonly with more of mean-

ing and sincerity than fall to the lot of many almost-of-course salutations. Words in which there is a shade of melancholy, and a gleam of gladness; a lingering of regret, with the very new birth of anticipation.—‘A Happy New Year.’

Ah, but it is not unlike parting with an old friend, the saying good-bye to the Old Year. And it seems unkind to turn from him who has so long dwelt with us, and to take up too jauntily with a new friend.

He had his faults: but, at any rate, we know them; and those of the new-comer have yet to be discovered. And his

virtues seem to stand out in bolder relief, now that we feel that we shall never see him again. Such experiences, too, we have had together! we have been sad and merry in company, and the days of our past society come with a warm rush to our heart:—

‘Though his eyes are waxing dim,
And though his foes speak ill of him,
He was a friend to me.’

And so we still keep hold of his hand, loth, very loth indeed to part—as we sit in silence by the flickering fire, and listen to the swelling and the sinking of the bells.

It is our habit—(I speak in the name of myself, and of many of my readers)—it is an immemorial custom with us, to assemble, all that can do so, in the old home, from which we have at different times taken wing,—to gather, I say, together there again, on the last night of the Old Year. I have heard the plan objected to, but I never heard any objections that to my mind seemed weighty ones. True, the gaps that must come from time to time, are perhaps most of all brought prominently, sadly before us, at such a gathering as this. We miss the Husband, the Wife, the Brother, the sweet Girl-daughter, the little one’s pattering feet—ah, sorely, sorely then! Last year the familiar face was among us, and now, now, it is far away, under the white sheet of snow. And our hearts are sad, but not with a mere unstarlit night of gloom. Nay, I maintain that, to those who look at it rightly, at such a gathering, stars of comfort shine out more in number and of brighter rays than at other times, to compensate for the deepening dark. There is the comfort of sympathy, and of

seeing in all surrounding faces how the lost one was loved. But, especially, it seems as though, when all are met again, that one may not be far away from the circle that was so unbroken upon earth :

‘ Nor count me all to blame if I
Conjecture of a stiller guest,
Perchance, perchance, among the rest,
And, though in silence, wishing joy.’

And, above all, there is the old-fashioned, but ever new comfort—balm, indeed, of Gilead, for every bereaved heart.

‘ I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. ‘ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.’

And these home gatherings, yearly growing more incomplete, and, on the other hand, yearly increasing, lead the heart to glad thought of that reunion hereafter, in the House of our Father, in which the mansions are many, the Home, one.

Well, you are gathered, my friend and reader, you and your dear ones, about your Father’s fireside on this last night of the Old Year. The hours have stolen on : at ten o’clock the servants came in, and the last family prayers of the year have been offered up, and the last thanksgiving of the assembled household ; and the chamber candlesticks have been set out, and the Father has drawn his chair near the fire, and another log cast upon it crackles and flashes ; and each and all announce the intention of seeing the Old Year out, and the New Year in.

Cheery talk, reminiscent talk, pensive talk, thankful talk ;

—a little silence. The wind hurries against the window, and throws against it a handful of the Old Year's cast-off leaves. The clock on the mantelpiece given eleven deliberate, sharp tings. The year has but an hour to live. And now the wind brings up a clear ring of bells; and then sinks, that the Old Year may die in peace, and his requiem be well heard over the waking land.

But an hour to live! And the burden of depression that ever comes with the exceeding sweetness of bells, loads, grain after grain, the descending scale of your spirits. It is a solemn time, a time for quiet: a time in which it is well to leave even the dear faces, and to get you apart alone with God.

So you steal away from the fireside blaze; and ascend the creaking stairs, and enter your own room; and close the door, even as a dear Friend long ago advised; and offer the last worship of the year—confessions, supplications, intercessions, praises. You go over the dear names, sweet beads of the heart's rosary, telling them one by one to God, with their several wants and needs. You mention once more the special blessings to them and to yourself of the past year. You put, once more, all the future for them and for yourself into that kind, wise Father's hand; and you feel rested then, and at peace. A few words read, for the last time this year, in the Book of books; and now there is yet a little space for quiet thought about the dying year, before his successor enters at the door.

And it is then, as you sit pensively before the dancing fire, alone in your silent room—while the bell music now comes in bursts, and now dies in dream-sound,—that a sort of abstract of many thoughts, that have hovered about you all day, is

summoned up before your mind. It is the hour of soft regret, helped, I say, by those merry, melancholy bells, which—

‘Swell up and fail, as though a door
Were shut between you and the sound.’

You have had your sad times in the year that is so nearly dead; you have shed your bitter tears; you have had your lonely hours, your weariness of this unsatisfying, disappointing world. Unkindness, estrangement, bereavement, intense solitariness of the spirit, when it is conscious that not another being than the Creator can ever understand, far less supply, its want, or heal its woe—these experiences, these wearing, shaping, refining operations of the kind Father are part of your memories of the dying year. While their bitterness was present with you, you would have said that it was impossible that you could ever regret to part with the year that brought them. ‘Ring out,’ you would have said, ‘ring out, wild bells, this unkind and bitter year; this year that hath brought a blight over my life; this year that hath dispelled the dreams of youth, and changed into a wilderness that which did blossom as the rose. Ring out, and let this hard year die. Fleet, hours and days and weeks and months, and set a distance between me and what I long to call the *Past*. Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky; gladly would I say now, even now, while I listened to you—

“The year is dying—let it die!”

But those hours of bitterness are now, even now, of the past. That sharp pain, or that weary ache, is dulled, perhaps removed. Perhaps you have learned God’s lesson in it, and can

thank Him, though the ache still dwells in the heart's heart. At any rate, the Old Year is passing away; the sad Old Year, the glad Old Year; upon the whole—yes, upon the whole, the *dear* Old Year. He is with you but for a few minutes more; he has come to say 'Good-bye.'

Who does not unbend at such a time? In all the friendships, in all the ties of life, there comes up surely, when the time comes which is to end that connection for ever, the whole warmth, the whole kindly feeling of the heart. There may have been some old grudges, discontents, heart-burnings, jealousies, disappointments. But they are forgotten now, and the eyes have a kindly light, and the lips a tender word, and the hand a hearty shake, when it has indeed come to saying 'Good-bye.'

And so with the Old Year, whatever he has been to us, whatever little disagreements we may have had, whatever heart-burnings,—they are not much remembered now.

It is a Friend that is leaving you, you are not glad to part with him; *Good-bye, Old Year, Good-bye.*

Another regretful thought;—as the twilight flickers and dances on the blind, and those bells still dance hand-in-hand, row after row, close up to the window, and still pass away, hardly perceived, into the distant fields. The dying Year brought some happiness, some love; this is now warm and safe in the nest of the heart; the coming time may fledge it, and it may, some summer day, take sudden wing and fly.

'He brought me a friend, and a true, true love,
And the New Year will take 'em away.'

Youth is especially the time, perhaps, for a sort of tender prophetic hint of the evanescence and passing away of hopes, loves, dreams. It is indeed but a rose-leaf weight on the heart, only the shade of a gossamer passing across the sun; yet there the weight, the shadow, frequently is. The iron hand of real crushing bereavement, of actual anguish, has never yet had the heart in its gripe, to crush out all that more tender sentiment. Yet some soft, faint presentiments of darker hours do, unaccountably, early fall across the daisy fields of youth. And thus, in youth, a certain fore-shadowing; in mature years, a stern experience, brings into the heart, when the Old Year is passing, a thoughtful dread of losing what we already have; an undefinable apprehension of the future. This time next year, when the New Year has become the Old, and its turn has come round to say good-bye, what changes may have come to us, to our circle, to our home! Will all be then as it is now? Will love, perhaps newly acquired, still nestle in our heart, or will it have even taken wings like a dove, and have left it—

‘Like a forsaken bird’s nest filled with snow’?

Oh, who shall tell? Answer, quiet heart, that hast learned to trust in God; and rest, rest peacefully, brightly, hopefully, on the answer that God hath taught thee!

But a quarter of an hour left now of the Old Year’s life! and the wind brings the bells in a sudden burst, like rain, against the window. Before you join the group downstairs there is yet another, the saddest subject for regretful thought. The past hours of the past days of the year nearly past might have been better spent, oh, how much so, than they have been!

‘*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*’ Has *that* been the rule of the past year? Ah, if we dared think this, how different a year would it be to look back upon! How many opportunities neglected altogether! How many but weakly and slackly employed! Opportunities that can never come again, that, employed or neglected, are past now. The word that might have done infinite good, but that was not spoken—cowardice, weak complaisance, in a word, *worldliness*, God’s enemy, fettered the tongue: excuses were ready, though the heart did not believe them, and God’s soldier failed, and the devil had the better of that field. Again, actions that sloth or love of worldly ease caused to die out into smoke when they should have been eager leaping fire. An occasion came, once and again, of doing something for God. The duty was a laborious one, a painful one; nevertheless, however painful, it had to be done; you had resolved that it should be done; you had even sought help upon your knees for the work. But mark the carnal coward spirit creeping over the spiritual manly resolve: a friend came in, a persuasion turned you, your heart, alas! hardly really in earnest, did not set itself as a flint to its purpose, too willing to be turned aside, it basely accepted the tempting excuse, and laboured thereupon to believe itself really acquitted from the duty. Those opportunities passed away, the noble action was not done, the faithful word was never spoken, the heart’s reproaches became dull, and the neglected duty ceased its weary gnawing at the conscience. But amid the fitful sinking and falling of the firelight and the bells, as you sit on the rug, hand-shading your eyes—the neglected opportunity

comes back, with all its reproach, even newer and keener than at the first; back again to accuse your faint-heartedness, to upbraid your lukewarm love; to tell you of One who died for you, and yet for whom you shirk the least distasteful labour, the least taking up the cross, and denying yourself to follow Him.

And, besides all this, when you think of the whole past year, even of its hours (how few, and how grudged!) when you have tried to do the work which the Master put into your power to perform for Him, how conscious you are of the want of heart in even your best endeavours; you cannot but feel how diligently the world's votaries have been working for *their* master, and how slackly *you* have been labouring for your Master and only Saviour—how they have been running, with eyes fixed on the goal; and how you have been loitering and limping, looking behind, and on this side and on that, not with single purpose, pressing towards the mark—ah, no!

And you think, then, what this brief life might have been—might even yet be. A life that looked straight forward, that turned not to the right hand nor to the left, that paused for no alluring of pleasure, for no constraining of business—

‘This way and that dividing the swift mind,’

and wasting its energy and powers. A life that set God first, utterly first; that shouldered aside the world's jostling, distracting importunities; that left the little concerns, the little loves, the little jealousies of Time, staring after its eager, swift, stedfast advance, whenever they would have interposed to hinder it. A life that really and in good earnest, not half-heartedly and in pretence, should leave all to follow Christ.

A life with something in it of the unflinching, unswerving, unpausing persistency of those old Jesuits; only spent indeed in the service of Jesus, and not in that of the Pope and the Inquisition. You think of a St. Paul, and his onward, onward still, 'in weariness and painfulness, in watching often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness,' and think of your lagging, loitering ——!

Yes, that is best: on your knees once more, asking for pardon and for grace—grace to love Him more and to serve Him better, in the year so near at hand! God shall wipe away all those tears that love for Him made to flow, and the blessed Saviour's perfect righteousness shall hide all our vile and miserable rags. Yet even the saved, we can almost fancy, will wish, with a feeling *akin* to regret, to have loved the blessed Lord more; and he who has gained but five pounds will surely wish that it had been ten. For our opportunities, it often seems to me, are such as angels might long to have. Where *all* are serving God, and we have no longer a sinful nature dragging us back, nor a glittering world around us, nor a subtle Tempter at our ear—it will seem little, methinks, to serve God then and there. But now, and here, in a world lying in wickedness, where the more part are not on Christ's side, but rather leagued with or deserters to the devil, the world, and the flesh—oh, what an Abdiel opportunity to stand up, a speaking, living protest in life's least and greatest thought, word, and act: a burning and a shining light, reflecting the beams of the Sun of Righteousness in a dark and naughty world!

May, then, by God's grace, this quiet hour of thought, of regretful meditation, be the point on which you have collected



your powers and energies for a forward spring, that shall not grow slack through eternity !

Five minutes to twelve now. The hour of Regret is near its close. The hour of Anticipation is close at hand. The Old Year's bells are running down, and the Old Year's life is passing with them. Five minutes more. First you bow your head, and adore the Almighty and the All-loving—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—for the Past, for the Present, and for the Future. Then you go downstairs, according to old custom, to join the rest of the dear circle at the open window, and to listen for the ceasing of the bells.

They are gathered at the window, standing quietly and thoughtfully ; those that are nearest and dearest linked with loving arms ; they are silent, or speak in a subdued tone. You might almost think that they were indeed standing by some bedside, watching the last breathing of a friend ; for a solemn thing it is, the passing from one to another of these stepping-stones in the brook of life, while the other shore seems to gather a more distinct shape through the mist of the Future.

You join the group. A cold, moist air, full of films of snow, comes out of the dark night into the warm, bright room. The moments are running away in rhythm of bells ; you might almost fancy them the sands, the last few grains of the Old Year's life. Suddenly the cadence stops, and in the breathing silence a deep clang falls from the church tower,—another,—ten more yet,—and the Old Year is dead.

‘A happy New Year!—a happy New Year!’ Warm kisses and hearty shakes of the hand, and, as the downward crash of a great breaker that has seemed to pause for a moment in the

air, down bursts the glad, the melancholy, ring of bells again, and floods the bare shore of silence,—still lingering, seething, receding, gathering into new bursts again, and yet again.

A happy New Year! The Past is past, the Old Year is dead, the hour of Regret is gone by, the time of Anticipation is here; not Good-bye now, but Welcome; not lingering retrospect, but earnest advance. Life is too short for long mourning; not much time can be spared to meditate by the fresh grave of the Past. Forward, towards the unknown Future: grasp its opportunities, its sorrows, its joys; employ them to be woven into some rich fabric for the Master's use! On, towards the untried Future, bravely, trustfully, hopefully, cheerfully. But remember that you can never overtake it. It changes into the Present even as you come up with it; and it is Now, or Never,—that you must be serving God.

‘Trust no Future, howe’er pleasant,
Let the dead Past bury its dead;
Act, act in the living Present,
Heart within, and God o’erhead.’

But good night to all, or good morning—which?—and then upstairs, and tired, to bed. When you awake, things will go on as much as usual, though the Old Year be dead, and sentry January have relieved sentry December. Only for a time you will find yourself still dating 18—, and, if untidy, you will have to smear, if tidy, to erase, the last figure, and substitute the number of your new friend.

Anticipation. This is especially the dower of the young, if Regret be often the possession of the old. What a strange, glorious thing a New Year is to the child! Little of the feelings that I have been describing find place in the breast

of the boy and girl, that were fast asleep and warm in their beds, while you and the bells were at conference: little of such musings trouble them, as they bound out of bed in the morning, and scuttle off in their night-gowns, patter patter, in a race, to be the first to wish Father and Mother a happy New Year. They are growing out of childhood: *that* is the joy for them: another of those wide intervening periods has passed. —Happy Spring, that does but long to shed and cast away her myriad white blossoms; and to rush on towards the full-grown Summer:—unknowing in the least, of the sober, misty, tear-strung, if fruitful, Autumn boughs! A happy New Year, my darlings! Far be it from me to strip Spring branches in order to imitate the Autumn which they cannot know! God keep you, my children; God teach you, and God bless you!

A little farther on. Anticipation is glowing warmly in the heart of the youth and of the maiden. The time of childhood is left behind. The time of independence, the time of manhood, is drawing near: that time that shall transform into realities, into noble, world-stirring deeds, the great things that have hitherto been only schemes. That time when the loves that are budding in the heart shall burst into exquisite blossoms, and never a frost nip them, and never a rude wind carry at unawares a loose petal away.

A happy New Year. The heart accepts this wish, fearlessly, without misgiving or doubt, before the contest, before the rough work of a field or two in the scarce-tried warfare of life has smirched the glittering armour, and shorn the gay plumes, and changed the song before the battle into hard labouring

sobs, in the stern hand-to-hand tussle with sin and with sorrow, with disappointment and dismay. Before many a scheme overturned, many a brave effort fallen dead as bullets against a stone wall, many a seeming hopeful struggle forced back by the sheer dead weight of evil, has made the heart sick and the knees to tremble, and brought an early weariness and a hint of despair over the amazed Recruit; a touch of that revulsion felt by the Prophet of old: 'It is enough: evil is too strong for me: I can do no more than others have done before: my efforts have come to nothing, my bubbles have burst: now let me die.' But the Recruit becomes the Veteran, and is content to wait, where he was once ready to despair. He does not hope so much, and therefore is not so much dismayed; he relies now not so much on earthquake efforts, as on the still small voice uttered to the world by the life which is given to God. He is content to labour,—and to leave it to the Master to give the increase.

Yes, the young heart, even when lit with heavenly love, and full of great designs for God, must submit to the overthrow of the bright visions that anticipation set before it. How much more, when its fire was lit from earth; and earth's loves, or fame, or pleasure, or power, were the prizes for which life's battle was to be fought. Vanity and vexation of spirit, disappointment, dismay, despair; these are the ruins that shall be won in place of Moscows, if that battle be fought to the end!

'A happy New Year.' That glad wish of youth may come to sound, to the man, nothing but bitter irony. But much of the early hope, and more than the early peace, comes back, as life goes on, to the veteran worker for God.

‘Who, but the Christian, through all life
That blessing may prolong?
Who, through the world’s sad day of strife,
Still chants his morning song?’

A happy New Year, then, dear youth and fair maiden! God grant it you, in the one true sense of the word (not the etymological sense, for we do not want it to be *really* a matter of ‘hap’). Nor need the happiness be a freedom from sorrow: this is an ennobling, useful discipline, that we may not wish you to avoid. But, to be, really, a happy New Year, it must be free from sloth and wilful sin.



Look out from your window again, at the snow sheet which has silently, deeply, fallen upon the earth. Let it be very

early in the morning, while the world is asleep and the broad moon and the glittering stars watch alone over the smooth, sparkling, white face of the land. Not a footstep, so far as you see, has impressed the smooth, pure snow; not a dark cart-track has yet left a long stain on the spotless road. No thawing, penitential drippings have made dark wells in it here and there; no rude sweeping has piled its virgin whiteness in stained heaps hither and thither by the path. All is yet pure, untouched, undefiled.

This is the New Year upon which we have entered, as we look at it from the casement of the Old Year, before yet one step has been placed on its first moment. All as yet unstained, and white, and calm.

For how short a time to remain so! Can we set our first step upon it without somewhat marring its virgin beauty? And then the traffic, the hurrying of many feet, the crushing of many wheels; thought, word, and deed, too often unwatched and unsanctified by prayer. What a change soon, and how short a time that purity and calm has lasted!

New Year; clean New Year; how dark, how defiled, how changed will you be, when you also are now waxing old, and ready to vanish away! The white virgin opportunity will have often passed by, leaving dark, dreary, sodden fields, and roads churned up into yellow mud. The clinging spotless moments—flakes that, in innumerable combination, made up the great stainless carpet of the untrodden New Year; in their place there will be many a trickling rivulet of penitential tears; and the steam and mist of heavy sighs that go up to God because of life's work too faintly, slackly done. Doubt-

less, however, that is well. Better, of course,—if it could have been so,—better that the pure year had continued unstained.

‘My little children, these things I write unto you, *that ye sin not.*’

But well, for us poor weaklings, if we are indeed humbly striving, and if hearty repentance, and a true, lively, cleansing faith follow upon our many, many sad failings, faults, and shortcomings. For,—sweet words!—

‘*If any man sin*, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins.’

And, glorious thought! if we are indeed loving and seeking after purity and holiness, striving because of the hope within us, to purify ourselves, even as He is pure—then this we know, that we shall not love, and seek, and strive in vain.

‘When He shall appear, *we shall be like him.*’

Think of that! So that, when our last hour comes, and the bellringers are ready, for us, to ring out the Old Year of this life, and to ring in the New Year of the next; and we are looking (our near and dear ones still by us) out of the case—ment of the Old Year of TIME, what may we then see? There shall be stretched out before us the immeasurable unstained tract of the New Year of ETERNITY, unsullied, spotless, pure and white: and we need not then be afraid to enter upon that. The blood of Jesus, which cleanseth from all sin, will have so cleansed us, that even *our* footsteps will not stain nor mar it. The spots and the defilements, the tears and the sighs, they will lie all behind us then, in the Old Year which is dead. Ring

out, oh ringers, then—toll not for its death, but ring out the year of sadness and of sin, of weak strivings, cold hearts, and dull love! Ring out the year of partings and estrangements, of death and tears! And ring in—God grant that this may be the experience of every reader of these musings!—ring in with none but joy-notes, ring in that everlastingly **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**



MUSINGS ON THE THRESHOLD.

ETERNALLY that fable is true, of a choice being given to men on their entrance into life. Two majestic women stand before you: one in rich vesture, superb, with what seems like a mural crown on her head and plenty in her hand, and something of triumph, I will not say of boldness, in her eye; and she, the queen of this world, can give you many things. The other is beautiful, but not alluring, nor rich, nor powerful; and there are traces of care and shame and sorrow in her face; and (marvellous to say) her look is downcast and yet noble. She can give you nothing, but she can make you somebody. If you cannot bear to part from her sweet sublime countenance which hardly veils with sorrow its infinity, follow her: follow her, I say, if you are really minded to do so; but do not, while you are on her track, look back with ill-concealed envy on the glittering things which fall in the path of those who prefer to follow the rich dame, and to pick up the riches and honours which fall from her cornucopia.

A. HELPS.



CALL February the Threshold of the Year. In January we were indoors, beside the fire, and there seemed little of new and various to tempt us out. But February comes, and with it the first dream of change, the first scarce-heard whisper of the Spring. The almost certainty of a snowdrop, hinting its yet undrooping white through a peaked green film; the eager hope of a primrose bud, peeping with yellow point, for all the world just like that of a coloured crayon—out of the young, crisp, green leaves

that are crowding the limp, ragged ones of last year; the wild dream of a possible find of those sweet buds—little geologists' hammers, with white or violet noses—among their round seeds and drilled leaves, in some warmer corner; such

summonings as these woo the steps to the threshold on a strayed mild day late in February.

‘Blonde hazel-tresses droop about
The copse still bare and dead;
Twin emerald honeysuckle leaves
Alight, with wings outspread;
In chestnut woods full glistening buds
Foretell the leafy domes;
A general instinct dawns of life,
—When February comes.’

The black soaked trees have, we find, taken a warm hue of growth; the dull willow bushes have the gleam of golden hair; the first soft breath of the year comes to our hearts with a gush of promises; flowers and leaves seem possible to the heart waking from its winter stagnation; trees and men alike feel a new life, a fresh impulse. Even though we have become ‘hard wood and wrinkled rind,’ our sap is, nevertheless, stirred:

‘And even in our inmost ring
A pleasure is discerned,
From those blind motions of the Spring,
That show the year is turned.’

And, perhaps, we are content to pause on the threshold, and lean against the lintel, and survey the smile close at hand, and the gleam far away; and—while the robin draws near in a cheerful, not to say enthusiastic, sympathy with our humour, and the faint branchy shadows move tenderly on the glistening lawn—to muse, on the year’s threshold, concerning the programme that the wind is whispering among the bushes, and the promises that the warm air is wafting into the heart.

Musings on the Threshold. Such musings might take many an obvious high road, or by-path, or quaint turn, we must feel, as we stand on the threshold of our house, and of the year, looking out upon the herald-gleam, and fanned by what seems a Spring air; an air that summons sweet thoughts of March, April, May—scarce June yet; certainly not October or November. On the threshold of the Spring; this we would rather say, and forget that it is really the threshold of the year—that thing composed of smiles and tears, of gleams and showers, of full green boughs and bare sticks, of promises and disappointments, of growth and life, and decay and death. For instances of the turns these threshold musings might take, how often—ere we shall have passed on so far in life's journey, that we stand on the threshold of the next state—how often do we pause for awhile upon some threshold, and lean back against the door and muse. On the threshold of joy, or on the threshold of misery; on the threshold of hope, or on the threshold of despair; on the threshold of school, or of the holidays; on the threshold of being flogged, or expelled; of gaining the three head prizes of the school—these possibilities gave musings to some, in early days. Later, on the threshold of a pluck, or of a double first-class; on the threshold of first love; and—oh, the dim, delicious look-out, and long, ecstatic musings!—on the threshold of being married: of parting with some beloved one—and ah, how a stern hand seems to drag you forth from your contemplation, into the dread reality, here, when your musings were scarce begun! On the threshold of the first fall from purity or honour—and, alas, the dismal journey

that shall follow upon the threshold left, and the first step taken! On the threshold of repentance; and angel-eyes watch eagerly, and angel-hands poise above their golden harps; and at the first step forward a ringing rapture peals up into the trembling roof of Heaven.

‘Musings on the Threshold’ :—are there not then, highways and by-paths which such musings might well take? But it is time for us to choose our present road; and, to do so, we will even go back to the beginning of a well-trodden way, upon which every one of us is found, some not very far from the starting-point, some near the middle, some tottering on close to the goal.

On the threshold of Life. Yes, once upon a time we stood there: and the Spring air was rife with half-shaped songs and indistinct delicious whispers; and we knew that the hedges and copses were full of all sweet promise-buds; and there were songs in the distance, and an interminable thronging of inexhaustible flowers, and life seemed too sweet, when the first blossom that was our own was grasped in our hand, and the stir of vitality growing conscious and intelligent first made the heart glow and kindle, as we paused musing upon the Threshold, and looked out upon the sweet, strange opening year of Life.

But truly, the step soon has to be taken, that marks the beginning of the inevitable separation from those lovely, unreal dreams. There is Solomon’s way of leaving them—much labour, and little profit, and a bitter heart at the end. And there is that other way of leaving them—the hearing once and again, and gradually heeding, an oft-repeated solemn call,

‘Follow Me.’ Out of the sunshine into the shadow; away from dreamy threshold musings, into the rough and stony highway; drop the flowers and clasp the cross; for how run the instructions given long ago, and given to all; given by precept and given by example? ‘Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’

How true of those who—at last, and after long hesitation—take the first step, and leave the threshold of this world’s young dreams, and begin to follow Him; how true that ‘little did they know to what they pledged themselves, when, in that first season of awe, they arose and followed His voice. But now they cannot go back, for they are too nigh to the unseen One, and His words have sunk deeply within them. Day by day they are giving up their old waking dreams; things they have pictured out and acted over in their imaginations and their hopes, one by one they let them go, with saddened but willing hearts. They feel as if they had fallen under some irresistible attraction, which is hurrying them into the world unseen; and so in truth it is. He is fulfilling to them His promise: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” Their turn is come at last, that is all. Before, they had only heard of the mystery; now they feel it. He has fastened on them His look of love, even as on Peter and on Mary; and they cannot choose but follow, and in following Him, altogether forget both themselves and all their visions of life.’

How strange it is, verily, after we have for many years, now, followed that Voice—followed it, no doubt, with many

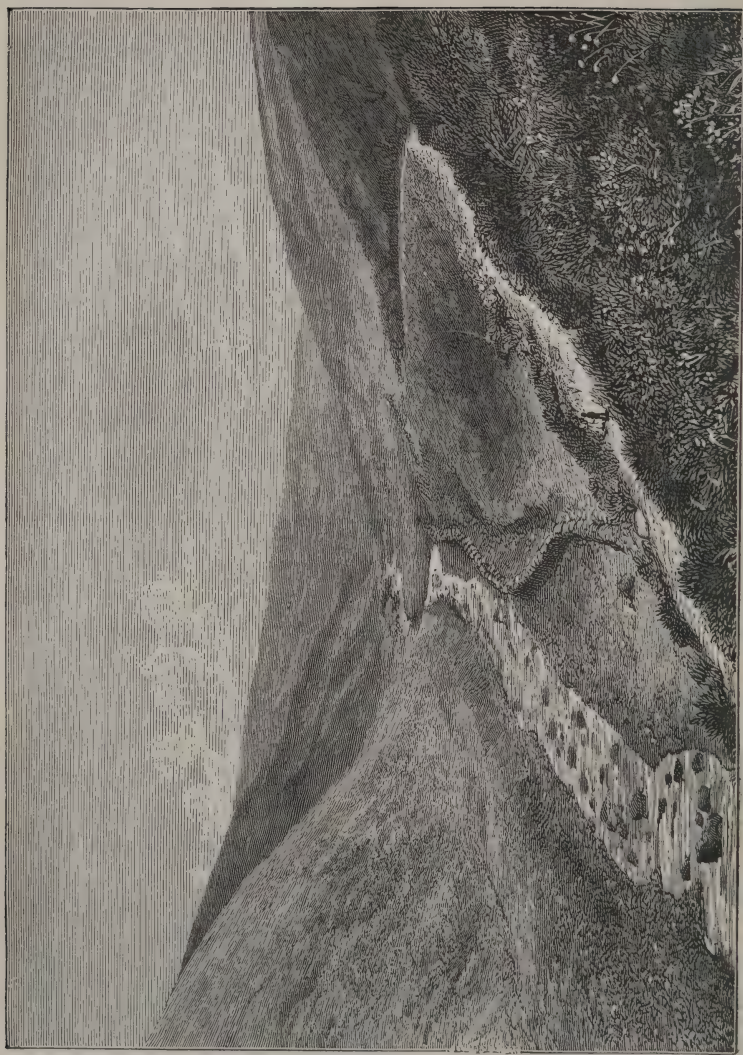
a declension, many a wavering, many a wayward swerving and almost turning back; yet, on the whole, followed it, and that with less of timidity, and more of implicitness, as Experience justified Hope;—how strange, about midway in the journey, to look back at Life's threshold! The January of infancy had passed; the February of stirring, conscious life had come, and we came out from our dormant state, and paused upon the threshold, and opened our awakening eyes upon the world. And now we look back, and with a strange, wondering interest, contemplate that single lonely figure that was, in old times, ourself, leaning in wrapt musing; the small home behind it; and before, the siren murmurs, and warm, flattering airs of the delicious, enticing Future. The magic dreams, the mirage reveries, the profuse promises, the unshaped hopes, the just-caught notes of some divine, distant melody; all the flowers to blossom; and all the birds to come. Ah, what sweet, wild musings were those! Far away we seemed to catch a gleam of that

‘Light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration, and the poet's dream.’

And even tears had their sparkle, and melancholy its charms, and death its unreal beauty.

‘To think of passing bells, of death and dying—
’Twere good, methought, in early youth to die,
So loved, lamented: in such sweet sleep lying,
The white shroud all with flowers and rosemary
Strewn o'er by loving hands.’

Thus, we remember, once stood that figure, solitary in its own individuality, upon the threshold, and looking out upon



A looly, narrow way, strewn with thorns and stones.

life. And contemplating our present self, we feel that it is 'the same, yet not the same.' How changed all has become! It is not only nor chiefly that flowers are less valued than fruit-germs, or sparkling glass than rough, hereafter-to-be-cut diamonds; it is not only, nor so much, that the world's promises and life's young dreams have failed us, as that we have turned away from them. That our taste has altered; that the things that then were all, are now nearly nothing; that what once rose before us a golden mirage, seems now as but bare sand; that what seemed gain, would be now held as loss; that what seemed too rare, and delicious, and high, and exquisite, and sublime, for more than trembling hope, has now become as refuse in our thought.

Time was, when other thoughts and purposes than these which now possess us, held sway in our hearts. Time was when we stood on the threshold, dazzled, and wondering, in a delicious dream, which, of all the sublime or lovely paths that opened before us, we should pursue. Time was, when at last we began to heed a kind, but still small Voice, that had from the first been speaking to us; when a grave Eye that had from the first watched us, at last fixed our attention. Time was, when we were compelled as it were, at first with hesitating, reluctant step, to follow that Voice and that Look—away from those bright gay paths, or grand aspiring ways, down a lowly, narrow way, strewn with thorns and stones, and sloping into a mist-hid valley. Time was—if we followed still—that the disturbing, distracting sounds and sights above being left behind and being now hushed,—the mist lifted, and lo! the valley was a pleasant valley, an abode of 'peace that the

world cannot give': and if the way was still rough sometimes, there were undying flowers of unearthly beauty here and there; and if the lark was away, the nightingale was singing; and it was answered to us, yea, our heart returned answer to itself, that, albeit narrow and strait at first, the name of that way was, in very truth, the Way of Pleasantness and the Path of Peace.

Ah, yes, if once we, with purpose of heart, set ourselves to follow His guiding, how God draws us on! We clutch at this, and would rest at that; and surely this is the Chief good, and the Ideal beauty? But no; the early flowers depart, and the late, and we leave the threshold and wander on; and February goes, and March goes, and even June, and August; and sorrowfully and wonderingly we look up at our Guide, following Him on through life, even into the grave September, and the hushed October, and the tearful November; and so into the Winter of alienation from the world, which Death's snow comes to seal.

But ere this comes we have found out His meaning in life, and the flowers of earth are no more regretted; and there is no point at which we would choose to have rested, now that we look back upon the past experiences and events of the journey; and our hand is quietly placed in His, and we look up with unutterable trust and ineffable love. It was not so once:

‘I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Wouldst lead me on;
I loved to see and choose my path,—but now
Lead Thou me on.’

‘And then He has led you, little by little, with gentle steps, hiding the full length of the way that you must tread, lest you should start aside in fear, and faint for weariness. And as it has been, so it must be; onward you must go; He will not leave you here; there is yet in store for you more contrition, more devotion, more delight in Him. A few years hence, and you will see how true these words are. If by that time you have not forsaken Him, you will be nigher still, walking in strange, it may be solitary paths, in ways that are “called desert”; but knowing Him, as now you know Him not, with a fulness of knowledge, and a bowing of heart, and a holy self-renouncement, and a joy that you are altogether His. What now seems too much, shall then seem all too little; what too nigh, not nigh enough to His awful cross. Oh, how our thoughts change! A few years ago, and you would have thought your present state excessive and severe; you would have shrunk from it then, as at this time you shrink from the hereafter. But now you look back, and know that all was well.’ In all your past life you would not have one grief the less, or one joy the more. It is all well.

And so it is, then, that we are led on from our February threshold, on through the maturing, decaying months, until the silent Winter comes. And what then? Is it to be, as in the natural year, the same over again—the same promises and disappointments, the same dreams and awakenings, the same unreal glory at the threshold, and the same gradual weaning from it on the journey?

Not so. To us the years are not repeated, nor is the ‘second life, only the first renewed.’

‘I know not, oh, I know not
What joys await us there;
What radiancy of glory,
What bliss beyond compare.’

But I love to wander, nevertheless, in my musings, far beyond the journey, to the Land whither the journey is tending. Beyond this state of probation to that of fruition; beyond striving, to attainment; beyond discipline, to perfection; beyond labour, to rest; beyond warfare, to victory; beyond constant slips and shortcomings, and half-heartedness at best, to steadfast holiness; beyond the cross to the crown. We are yet within doors: oh, what will open before us on the threshold of that next year!—when the first wonder of its January has passed, and the amazed and almost dizzied soul has straightened and uncrumpled its wings, and collected its powers, and can calmly begin to understand its change, and to muse on its future, and to grasp the idea of the possession upon which it has come: to anticipate the endless succession of amaranthine flowers, ever increasing in glory throughout the months of Eternity, and the songs that shall ever throng more and more abundant and ecstatic, and never migrate nor pass away!

On the Threshold. Those in Paradise are now musing on the threshold, waiting for their full consummation and bliss both in body and soul, waiting for that coming of the Lord with regard to which they are still crying out, ‘How long?’ and are bid to ‘rest yet for a little season.’ And so then they rest, and wait upon the threshold, and contemplate the mighty and magnificent panorama outspread before them as

their Future. The Voice is still there, and the Look; and they wait its summons, to leave the threshold, and to follow once again. But how different that following then! How far other than of old that summons! Not to paths of humiliation and discipline, and hills of difficulty, and valleys of shadow, but to realms of brightness and beauty unspeakable, and to heights to which earth's ambitions never soared. From the threshold of blessedness into the domain of glory; from Abraham's bosom to the throne of the Lamb; from a star to the Sun in His strength.



And so may we think of our dead that fell asleep in Jesus, as waiting upon that blessed threshold, contemplating that ravishing prospect, which is theirs, and may be ours. Nor do we enough thus think of and realise the state of the

departed. The poisonous fungi of error have made us shy of the wholesome mushroom of truth. 'The superstition of ages past has recoiled into the sadduceeism of to-day.' And so we, the dying, compassionate those who have begun to live, and who stand upon the threshold of the yet higher and more perfect life of the Resurrection. Let us think of them more nobly, more worthily, more truly. Let us not heap their burial with gloom: let not our souls dwell with their bodies under the sodden clay. They are changed, but they are not lost; they are 'still the same, and yet are not what they were: they have passed from the humiliation of the body to the majesty of the spirit. The weakness, and the littleness, and the abasement of life are gone; they are now excellent in strength, full of heavenly light, ardent with love, above fallen humanity, akin to angels.' 'Blessed and happy dead!—great and mighty dead! In them the work of the new creation is well-nigh accomplished; what feebly stirs in us, in them is well-nigh full. They have passed within the vail, and there remaineth only one more change for them,—a change full of a foreseen, foretasted bliss. How calm, how pure, how sainted are they now! A few short years ago, and they were almost as weak and poor as we; burdened with the dying body we now bear about; harassed by temptations, often overcome, weeping in bitterness of soul, struggling with faithful, though fearful hearts, towards that dark shadow from which they shrank, as we shrink now.'

We on our threshold and they on theirs; then let us think of them and of ourselves so. We have left the threshold of

life, and are nearing the threshold of Death, or rather of the beginning of Life indeed. They behold the prospect at which we guess, and which we burn to see. But because it may be ours one day, we are already sharers with them, and our higher union is rather cemented than interrupted. 'The unity of the saints on earth with the Church unseen is the straitest bond of all. Hell has no power over it, sin cannot blight it, schism cannot rend it, death itself can but knit it more strongly. Nothing is changed but the relations of sight: like as when the head of a far-stretching procession, winding through a broken, hollow land, hides itself in some bending vale, it is still all one; all advancing together; they that are farthest onward in the way are conscious of the lengthened following; they that linger with the last are drawn forward as it were by the attraction of the advancing multitude.' Or, in another figure, beautifully has it been said, that when the Sun of Righteousness passed out of sight, the splendour of His hidden shining is reflected by His saints, 'till the night starts out full of silver stars.' 'In stedfast and silent course' they pass on, some disappearing below the horizon, some resplendent in mid-heaven, some just emerging from the other boundaries. And when the last has arisen, and some are yet sparkling in the blue vault, the Sun shall rise with sudden glory, and they all shall render to Him their light. But until that time, which no man knoweth, neither the angels of heaven, it is, for all the saints, a waiting upon the Threshold, in mighty musing upon the glory yet to be revealed; and, 'until all is fulfilled,' the desire of the Church unseen is stayed with the 'white robes' and the sound of the 'Bride-

groom's voice. Let us comfort one another with these words and these thoughts.

And now thus have we mused upon the Threshold, beginning first with the threshold of the life that is expecting death, and then soaring boldly to the threshold of the life that is expecting the Resurrection. We need reminding in this age that there are two sides to *this* expectation. There is 'a certain fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation,' as well as an ardent, and eager, and rapturous anticipation and longing for His coming, who cometh quickly, though He seem to tarry. And it is well to ask, when death ends our journey here, upon which threshold shall we prefer to wait, and which musing shall be our choice: the dreadful looking-for of judgment, or the ecstatic longing to hear that Voice which once said, 'Follow Me,' speak again to us, even to us, the incredible words—'Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' Choose we, my friends, carefully, prayerfully, deliberately, finally, and at once; for 'Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation.'

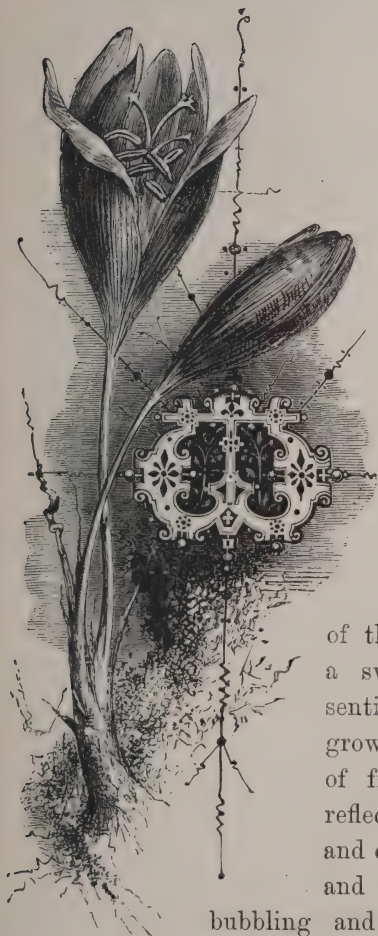


SPRING DAYS.

THE race is like a child, as yet
Too young for all things to be set
Plainly before him with no let
Or hindrance meet for his degree;
But ne'ertheless by much too old
Not to perceive that men withhold
More of the story than is told,
And so infer a mystery.

But reason thus: 'If we sank low,
If the lost garden we forego,
Each in his day, nor ever know
But in our poet souls its face;
Yet we may rise until we reach
A height untold of in its speech—
A lesson that it could not teach
Learn in this darker dwelling-place.'

JEAN INGELOW.



‘Forth in the pleasing Spring
Thy beauty walks, thy tenderness and love.
Wide flush the fields; the softening air is balm;
Echo the mountains round; the forest smiles;
And every sense, and every heart, is joy.’

THAT delight there is, for the child, in the coming of the first real Spring day! A burst into a buttercup-field! What a thing of mad enjoyment for the legs, and eyes, and hands, and mind of the young human animal! What a sweet time to think of, in our sentimental moods, now that we are growing old. And yet, in that time of fresh animal life, there was not reflection enough to allow of deliberate and conscious enjoyment of its hilarity and lightness of heart. It welled up bubbling and singing with the gladness of a spring, that yet is glad only because it is glad, and not because it is pure and bright. For it knows not

yet of aught that is muddy and foul, shallow and stagnant. It knows not of drought, and deadness, and impurity, and dulness, and death. How knows it, therefore, why it ought to be glad? Sing on, sweet stream, but you must be left to learn, as you roll seawards, into a sober old river, *why* you used to sing as a bright untroubled stream.

So, I suppose, except for the impetus and rush of early life in its Spring days, before it has been checked here, and wasted there, and hemmed in, and spread out, and turned away, and thwarted, until its rush, and song, and glee have settled into a quiet, useful soberness, or into a foul stagnant pool that cannot often bear to call to mind those old pure, careless days—except for that first impetus and rush, I suppose it is more an absence of something than a presence of aught, that makes the child's heart so glad. Anxious thought for soul and body of self and others; disappointment, regret, estrangement, remorse, satiety, failing powers; none of these check the young limbs, and the young lungs, and the young heart, as a sight of the brimming Spring meadow bursts upon the enchanted young eyes, and there is a shout, and a scamper, and a bound; and, lo! the little naked legs are deep in green grass, and yellow bobbing buttercups, and starry radiant daisies.

I cannot feel towards the buttercups and daisies exactly as I did in those very early days. It is indeed a very primitive state of things, when these are as gold and silver coins to the young eager grasping hand, that would try yet to hold more when already by twos, and ones, and threes, the white discs and yellow cups are slipping out of the little space that the finger and thumb cannot quite close in. You very soon get to

slight these humble flowers; and, losing your easy content, aim higher, even at cowslips, primroses, and here and there an early purple orchis. That is, perhaps, the most simple-hearted and easily-contented time of life, which asks no more for its riches than both hands full of buttercups and daisies,—guineas and shillings bright and fresh coined from the mint of Spring.



I remember well a wide meadow shut in with tall hedges, in which, for a Spring or two, while we were young enough to enjoy them, there was, for my two sisters and myself, a very scramble of such coins. Out on some mild April day, when the sun shone brightly, and the air was a growing air, and the paths dry. Out with our governess, we three, for a walk. A fortnight of soft April showers, or warm damp days, keeping

us within the garden while the field was being dressed, had prepared for us a surprise. We ran our hoops along the dry paths, until the winner of the race caught sight of that fair meadow. Through the white wicket-gate then, the hoop thrown aside into the yielding grass, and the three pairs of little hands were busy enough soon. At first the aim was merely to pick what came to hand, and quantity, not quality, was in demand. But,—so soon do we begin to undervalue that which is abundant in comparison of that which is less easily attained,—in a little while we were busy after rarities; mere white daisies were passed over, and those with a ‘crimson head’ were sought; also, I remember, those with a scarlet jewel in the centre of the boss of gold. Cowslips were rare in the fields about us; were anyhow rare at that early time of year. Fancy then our exultation, if we should come upon a pale bent head, the delicate trembling spotted yellow curving upwards towards the sheath of faint green. The bound towards it; the excitement of feeling the juicy crisp stalk break, and then the triumphant possession of the treasure! I remember such a *find* now, though I be far on in life beyond the early stage marked by that slight drooping flower.

But of course the daisies and buttercups, even before ‘whole summer fields were theirs by right,’ soon, even in those early simplest days, lost their fascination, before the advance of other rarer flowers. We could pass the meadow soon, without bounding into it, on our way round the park wall on a *violet* expedition. Their scent would betray these precious flowers, and we would eagerly part the crowding leaves and the binding ivy-nets that hid them. Not much fear was there lest

we should gather enough of them to risk dropping any from an over-filled hand. Still, we mostly went home well content with the close-clipped neat dark-blue bunch in one hand, with here and there a pure white prize, or a large white violet merely purple-tinged, gleaming out of the dark. These white-and purple-tinged violets, you must know, had become our prizes, being rare, found seldom indeed by the park wall, but oftener on some mighty sandhills, that towered above the highway a little beyond our daisy field, and seemed to bury the deep-lying road, with its winding carriages and pigmy passengers.

Out for a long walk now, even to that deep chalk-pit, where not *one* cowslip hung, rare, unique, precious, but *hundreds*, nay *thousands*, bent their pale yellow heads, and scented the air with their sweet faint breath. So jucily they snapped, without that drawback which I deplore in primroses—the long sinew that a hasty picking leaves behind, to the marring of the flower. Baskets we had, trowels in them, to collect some roots for the misused pieces of ground known as our gardens: and woe betide an early orchis, if we came across it. Nearly always, after a long and patient digging, when the final *pull* came, a long blanched stalk, with no root at the end, would meet our disappointed eyes.

But of course the great thing was to collect unlimited flowers. And really, if you turned me loose into the Bank of England, into that room in which those aggravating fellows shovel about the gold in coal-scuttle scoops, and bade me gather my fill, I am sure the delight would be neither so fresh, so sweet, nor so wholesome, as that entering unchecked upon the rich cowslip-wealth, trembling all over the short turf of

the sloping side of the chalk-pit which ended our expedition. Two principal objects had we in collecting these flowers—for as the year goes on, even children seek *use* as well as *beauty* in their gettings; first to make cowslip balls, many and large, when we got home; next, to make cowslip tea. There is, or was, a keen delight in the former of these pursuits. The excitement and delight of the first cowslip ball made is feverish and unsettling. The long, tight string upon which are hung the poor flowers with their tails pinched off; the filling that string, the tying it, with here and there a cowslip tumbling out; and then the playing with the sweet-scented soft toy, till the room is littered with its scattered wealth, these are things to remember even now. But, no doubt, the *great* thing was the cowslip tea—allowed to us that night instead of milk-and-water; and to be drunk in real teacups instead of mugs. The solemn shredding the yellow crown out of its green calyx; seated, all three, at our little low table with the deep rim; the growing heap of prepared flowers; then the piling them into the teapot, the excitement of seeing the boiling water poured upon them; the grave momentous pause while the tea was brewing; and the hearty, but really at last abortive, endeavour to persuade ourselves and each other that we liked the filthy concoction, and found it really a treat. Ah, life has many a cup of cowslip tea in it; delightful in the preparation, exciting in the anticipation, but most disappointing when it comes to the actual partaking!

We must not stop now to run down that green path into the wood—our one wood—nor to see which shall first enter it with a bound; we must not stop, although we know that a little later in the year there were some rare choice treasures

there. A firmament of starry wood anemones; and here and there a bent head of wild hyacinth, not yet ripened into its deep full blue; and here and there a pale green orchis, coming up out of the two ribbed leaves, valued because rarer than her purple brother, that but rarely yet towered with his tall rich spike above the clustering milky flowers. And on one bank that we knew, just two or three roots of primroses, the only primroses that grew wild for miles about that part, each tendering to us its crowded offering of sweet faint flowers, and deeper-hued yellow buds imbedded in the crisp, crumpled le ves. And then the lords and ladies: *lord*, handsomest—*lady*, rarest: I could pick and unroll them now. They call to mind a glad, bright little address of a child to the flowers, with which I will conclude these reminiscent wanderings among the old wild-flower fields of youth:—

‘Oh velvet bee, you’re a dusty fellow,
You’ve powdered your legs with gold!
Oh brave marsh marybuds, rich and yellow,
Give me your money to hold!
Oh columbine, open your folded wrapper,
Where two twin turtle-doves dwell!
Oh cuckoopint, chime me the purple clapper
That hangs in your clear green bell!’

Why have I recalled these child remembrances of early Spring days? Why, but to add that those keen delights, those exquisite, though comparatively unintellectual and reasonless, appreciations are gone—in this life for ever! Wherefore I use the words, *in this life*, I mean presently to shew: suffice it *now* to dwell on the fact that the Summer and Autumn of human life,

dry and dusty, or sorrowful and decaying, have parted company quite, except for some tender sweet reminiscent hints, with the freshness, and the glee, and the gladness of the old Spring days.

‘There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem,
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe’er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.’

These lines of Wordsworth express, very exquisitely, the butterfly-thought which I would hold in my net. Something goes, as we grow old—a gladness, a suddenness of appreciation, of enjoyment, is lost; and the dark Summer foliage is not the same with the fresh light green of the young Spring leaves. And when a gush of the old keen relish comes back for a moment, there is regret as well as sweetness in the brimming of tears that unawares dim the eyes.

Spring days, sweet Spring days, my quiet heart and rested eye tell me that there is no fear but that I enjoy you still!

‘Lo! the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.’

This exquisite poetry has its voice of delight for me, and as I shut my eyes, it brings, even before the Spring dawns, a change over the bare boughs and the Winter land. I dream of the chill black hedges and trees, flushing first into ruddy

or golden warmth, and then, behold, Spring seems to empty her jewel-casket over the forlorn branches. I dream of the birds coming back, one after one, until their song has set all the poetry of the flowers to music. And I go out into the land not only to dream of but to behold, and image these things. I watch for the delicious green, tasselling the earliest larch (there is every year one a fortnight in advance of the others) in the clump of those trees beside the road on my way home. I look, in a warm patch that I know, for the first primroses, and when I find them mildly and quietly gazing up at me from the moss, and ivy, and broken sticks, and dead leaves, a surprise, although I was expecting them, and a dim reflection of that old child-joy, bring with a rush to my heart again those 'Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.' And in the garden I wander through the bare shrubberies, varied with bright green box, and gather in my harvest there. The little Queen Elizabeth aconites, gold-crowned in their wide-frilled green collars; these are no more scant, and just breaking with bent head through cracking frosty ground. They have carpeted the brown beds, and are even waxing old and past now. The snowdrops have but left a straggler here and there; and the miniature golden volcano of the crocus has spent its jets of fire. The hazels are draped with slender, drooping catkins; the sweetbriar is letting the soft sweet-breathed leaves here and there out of the clenched hand of the bud. The cherry-tree is preparing to dress itself almost in angels' clothing, white and glistening, and delicious with all soft recesses of clear grey shadow, seen against the mild blue sky. The long branches laid low upon the lawn, of the

chestnut trees, are lighting up all over with the ravishing crumpled emerald that bursts like light out of the brown viscous bud—as sometimes holy heavenly thoughts may come from one whose first look we disliked ; or as God's dear lessons unfold out of the dark sheath of trouble. The fairy almond-tree—of so tender a hue that you might fantastically imagine it a cherry-tree blushing—throws a light scarf over a dark corner of the shrubbery. The laburnum is preparing for the Summer, and is all hung with tiny green festoons. Against the blue sky, on a bare sycamore branch, that stretches out straight from the trunk, a glad-voiced thrush seems thanking God that the Spring days are come. Wedged tight into three branching boughs, near the stem of a box-tree, I find a warm secure nest, filled with five little blue-green eggs. It is still a delight to me to find a nest ; a delight, if not now a rapture, an intoxication.

All these I see on one Spring day or another, as I walk into my garden, or out into the changing lanes. All these I see, and all these I love. But I see them, and I love them tenderly and quietly, not with the wonder and the glee of life's early Spring days. I am sad, partly because I know that a great deal of that old fresh ecstatic thrill has gone.

‘The rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the rose,
The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare ;
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair ;
The sunshine is a glorious birth ;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath passed away a glory from the earth.’

It must be so, naturally, if only from the mere fact that things must lose their newness, and so their wonder, to the eye and the heart. Do what you will, you must become accustomed to things. And the scent of a hyacinth or of the may, will cease, when familiar, to be the wonderful enchanting thing that childhood deemed it. And the *thirtieth* time that we see, to notice, the first snowdrop bursting through the pale green sheath above the brown bed, is a different thing from the *third* time. We appreciate delights keenly when we are young, seek the same in later years, but never find them ; and then all our life remember the search more or less regretfully. So Wordsworth, the old man, addresses the cuckoo that brought back his young days and his young thoughts by its magic voice :—

‘Thou bringest unto me a tale
Of visionary hours.
‘Thrice welcome, darling of the Spring !
Even yet thou art to me
No bird, but an invisible thing,
A voice, a mystery :
‘To seek thee did I often rove
Through woods and on the green :
And thou wert still a hope, a love ;
Still longed for, never seen.
‘And I can listen to thee yet ;
Can lie upon the plain
And listen, till I do beget
That golden time again.’

Enough ; of what may seem unpractical sentiment, merely. I must not wail like an Autumn wind among the young flowers, and the bright leaves, and the blithe songs of the sweet Spring

days, else I shall lay myself open to the reproach of the poet describing one who—

‘Words of little weight let fall,
The fancy of the lower mind—
That waxing life must needs leave all
Its best behind.’

It is not true really, that we are leaving behind us our best, when we have passed into the Summer, or even into the Autumn days. But there is a degree, a portion of truth in it. There is a sense, no doubt, in which even the ripe Summer does lose a beauty which is the peculiar possession of life’s crude Spring days.

First then (to divide sermon-wise), what is that we lose, when Spring days have made their escape, and are gone? This loss has been hinted at in nearly all that has been written above. We lose the *gladness of inexperience*, the gladness and enjoyment that is not *thoughtful*, nor such as can give a reason for itself, but that is merely *natural*, and welling up irresistibly as a spring. We lose the newness of things—aye, more, far more than this, we lose the *newness of ourselves*, the *freshness of our own heart*. *This* is (with some in a greater, with some in a less degree) what we discover that we have left behind, when we look back on life’s Spring days. Some of us, with a tender half-regretful watering, keep a hint, a reminiscence, of that old freshness. But many heedlessly suffer the world’s dust to coat it over, and the world’s drought to shrivel it up.

But now, in our leaving Spring days behind, what may we have gained, if there be something lost? If something we forego, let us not fear but that our gain is far larger than our

loss. We gain gladness and we gain sadness (I use the word *gain* advisedly)—the gladness and the sadness of *experience*. A gladness that is part of the depth of a grave river now: profound, if not light-hearted as the little spring. A gladness that, when it comes, is rather rational than merely animal; that has a reason to give for itself, and does not exist merely because it exists. A joy that is far more rare, also less ecstatic, but that is higher and deeper, having its birth in the *intellect*, and not simply in the *life* of the human creature.

To exemplify my meaning. In Art, compare the mere admiration that exists without knowledge, compare this with that which is an intelligent appreciation. Turned loose in ignorance into a Picture-gallery, how many things you admire, almost everything; and how fresh and uncritical is your admiration! But gain knowledge of Art, gain experience; and you straightway lose in *quantity* what you yet gain in *quality*. You admire fewer pictures, but your admiration of the few is a different thing from that old admiration of the many. It is a higher thing, more intelligent, more subtle, more refined. It is an *appreciation* now, not merely an ignorant admiration. You are harder to please; in one sense you have lost; but manifestly, on the whole you have gained.

And so with the gladness of manhood. It is a deeper, graver, more fastidious, yet a more reasonable and higher feeling than the gladness of the child. The sparkle, and bubble, and glitter, and singing have gone; but in their stead is a strength, an earnestness, an undercurrent not easily stayed or stemmed or turned aside. The gladness which is intelligent is better than the gladness which is instinctive.

And the sadness of experience (for we cannot live long in this world without discovering that life is exquisitely sad)—the sadness which comes with experience—is *this* also a gain? No doubt it is—no doubt it is. The wise man tells us that sorrow is better than laughter; that the house of mourning is better than the house of feasting. And a Greater than Solomon has endorsed with His lips and with His life the declaration, ‘Blessed are they that mourn.’

And who that regards life in its true aspect, but must bow a reverent and grave assent to this verdict? He who watches the effect on himself of God’s teaching, and of the lessons which He sets to be learnt, will understand what the Master means by His saying. He who regards his own life as something more than a life of toil, or a life of frivolity; he who sees that the life of man has its *schooling*, meant to raise it—above our natural meannesses, and petulances, and impulses, and weaknesses, and selfishnesses, and our ungenerousness—into something high and noble and steadfast, exalted, sublime, angelic, godlike; he who thus thinks of life, and watches life with this idea ever in view, will find it not hard in time to thank God for having made him sad, even while the sadness is fresh and new and keen in] his subdued and wounded heart. Disappointed in many things, and with many people, he will accept the disappointment with a quiet, anguished, thankful spirit, feeling that God, who took from him his prop, is raising the trailing vine from the ground, and instructing its tendrils to seek towards Himself, the only support that can never fail them. And this is well, he knows, who is a watcher of life, and a learner of its lessons.

And when sadness has produced this, its right and intended effect of sweetening, and not embittering the soul, a fresh advantage and gain steals, starlike, into the darkened sky. The heart that has been, in a sorrow, made lonely, except for God's then most nearly felt presence, is that which is the most braced and disentangled for the great and noble deeds of life. With a sad and a disappointed, if *yet still a loving, tender* heart, we can go out on God's work, go out to face evil, or to do good, more easily and thoroughly oftentimes than when this great Grave, the World, shows to us 'its sunny side.' Sadness, to him who humbly and prayerfully is seeking to learn God's lesson in life, has not a weakening but a tonic, power. God, who sends the sadness, sends also the health and the strength; yea, the strength arises out of the sadness. Something of what I mean is grandly expressed in the following extract:—

'There are moments when we seem to tread above this earth, superior to its allurements, able to do without its kindness, firmly bracing ourselves to do our work as He did His. Those moments are not the sunshine of life. They did not come when the world would have said that all around you was glad; but it was when outward trials had shaken the soul to its very centre, then there came from him . . . grace to help in time of need.'

Sadness, then, which braces and strengthens the character, which raises it into something nobler than it would otherwise have been; which sets a man free, and stirs him up for great and noble acts, for a resolute devoted doing of Christ's work on earth—such an experience is certainly a gain; and if this experience be our own, we are not, even when the Autumn

woods are growing bare,—we are not to wish to have back the old sweet Spring days.

Now one more loss and gain has occurred to my mind, contemplating those Spring days that seem, but are not, so far behind me in life. How often we pine after the innocence of childhood! how the poetry of our hearts, and of our writers, loves mournfully to recur to this!

‘The smell of violets, hidden in the green,
Poured back into my empty soul and frame
The times when I remember to have been
Joyful, and free from blame.’

But here, again, maturer thought will show us that we *need* not ‘have left our best behind,’ when the Spring days are with us no more. Deliberate and intelligent goodness and holiness is a better thing than mere innocence of childhood, which innocence, again, is rather the *absence* of something than the *presence* of aught. There has been merely neither time nor opportunity yet for much evil doing: there was, in this, no intelligent choice of good because of its goodness. And thus, if the man (although he have sinned far more than the child can have done) has yet, at last, and through much sharp experience, learnt life’s great lesson, and has become (however it be but incipiently) holy and good, that deliberate and positive, though imperfect goodness, is a greater attainment than the *mere negative innocence of the child*. Angelic innocence is, and the innocence of Adam would have been, no doubt, *intelligent* innocence. But now that we have fallen, that innocence (which, after all, is but comparative) of child-

hood is little else but the lack of time and knowledge and opportunity for sin. Such innocence is merely a negative thing, while holiness is positive. And he who is ripening into holiness in life's Summer, need not regret the mere innocence of its Spring days. In life's filled, and, alas! blotted pages, if amid many smears and stains, the golden letters of GOODNESS at last begin to gleam forth in a clear predominance, he who considers wisely will not regret much the newness of the book whose pages are only white and pure, because scarce yet written in at all.

* * * * *

‘The world passeth away, and the lust thereof.’ All is evanescent, passing away: not only the objects that we desire, but even our desire and appreciation of them too. Nor does this only apply to that which is *worldly*, in an evil sense. It applies, also, to some objects sad to lose, which still, however, to possess, no longer being able to appreciate them, is yet a sadder but an inevitable loss. When we look back upon life's Spring days, something really sweet, and beautiful, and desirable, seems left behind us and gone. Not life's best; not the *grape*, but the *bloom* on it; not the deep blue day, but the strange glory of the morning sky. Something seems lost. I am fond of maintaining that it will yet hereafter be found. In Heaven, I think, there will be not only beauty, fairer than that of our fairest Spring days; but an appreciative power, undying, ever existing; and *hearts* that shall not know what it is to be *growing old*. This life is one, I again toll, of incessant *passing away*. Friends and joys leave us, and even if they did not, the power of enjoying often goes, and the clasp of hands that

were once close-locked in friendship, deteriorates into a formal touch, from which the heart turns disappointedly away.

Here, you must lose, if you would gain; you must spend if you would buy. *Hereafter* it may be different. A hint of this seems given in that kindly prophecy of choice things to be had without money, and without price. 'Tis all clear profit *there*, I conclude; you add, without subtracting.

Yes, in that Land (to illustrate by a fancy) the Winter flowers will come, one after one, breaking through the frost-bound beds, and when the time comes at which we shall expect them to go, they will surprise us by staying with us still. The sweet, faint, mild Spring primroses will brim the copses, and spill over, trickling down the banks; the daffodils (not *Lentilias* there) will dance over the meadows in a golden sheet, and will wonder to find that they are *additions*, not *substitutes*. The trembling cowslips, the starry anemones, the wood-fulls of hyacinths, the rose champions, the purple orchis spires, these will supplement, not supplant, the fair growth that used to fade at the first footfall of their advent. And so the sweetbriar roses, red and burning, and their paler-petalled sisters with unscented leaves, and the clematis snow, and the honeysuckle clusters, and the brimming meadow-sweet; these will come not to fill an empty cup, but a full one, and one that yet, though full, is ever capable of containing more. And so snowdrops need not die for violets to come, nor violets vanish to make room for the rose. And Autumn will not supersede Summer, nor come, except to add to its quota of beauty. 'How then?' ask you, 'shall we not soon arrive at the end of the delights of the year, and weary with their sameness?' No, I reply,

for I think we shall not stop at Summer in Heaven, but ever go on into new and lovelier seasons; appreciating old pleasures with unweary hearts, but ever adding to them new.

‘Old things are passed away.’ That is, perhaps, this old fading state of things, of objects and capacity of enjoying them: and our ageing hearts that once were young, but that still (except for the youth and freshness that religion can preserve in them) *will* be ever growing so old—so old.

‘Behold I make all things new.’ *All* things—our hearts then, too: they will be again fresh, and that old forgotten or sorrowfully remembered child wonder, and appreciation, and love may come back; and the ‘forgets’ of our later years be called to mind again:—

‘Is it warm in that green valley,
Vale of childhood, where you dwell?
Is it calm in that green valley
Round whose bournes such great hills swell?
Are there giants in the valley,—
Giants leaving footprints yet?
Are there angels in the valley?
Tell me—I forget.’

But nothing that is beautiful to remember will be forgotten *there*. And the poet will no more lament a light gone out, a glory faded: our worn-out feelings, and spirits, and appreciations, and hopes, and beliefs, and wonders, and admirations, will be restored to us, new. So altogether new, so quite different in nature, as well as in degree, from the old, that they will *last* new, and not fade and perish in the using. *That* world will not pass away, nor the enjoyment thereof. For all there will be in perfect harmony with the will of God, which abideth for ever.

Everlasting Spring days! Think of that! Think, I mean, of an everlasting Spring season and freshness in the *heart*. The sadness which is an undercurrent of all earth's poetry, from the Nightingale's, upward, will have left our songs then!

‘We look before and after,
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.’

But this will then and there be no longer the case, for life will no longer be ‘A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.’ Season after season, joy after joy, will indeed dance into light, but will not, after a little brief while of enjoyment, die into the shade. Heaven's everlasting flowers will not grow dry, and dusty, and colourless; but for ever retain and increase the freshness, and the abundance, and the light, and the exquisite glory of those unimagined **SPRING DAYS**.



MUSINGS IN A WOOD.

AND O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway;
I love the brooks which down their channels fret
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born day

Is lovely yet;

The clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race has been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

WORDSWORTH.



Two pictures, (by Mrs. Anderson,) entitled, 'The Lark,' and 'The Nightingale,' have, for me, a great charm. In one, there is a blue-flecked sky, a Spring morning landscape, and a glad-eyed girl, with a lapful of daisies, lying back and looking up with hand-shaded gaze and listening eyes, into those blue depths, wherein

'The lark became a sightless song.'

In the other, there is an evening glow: warm, orange-grey sky, cooling into steel-blue; a bower of rose leaves; an earnest face, with darker hair, and pensive brow, flushed with the warmth of the setting sun. And you would know, even had you not been told, that the child, old enough just to enjoy that young melancholy which is pleasant,—is listening to that

'Wild bird, whose warble, liquid sweet,
Rings Eden through the budded quicks.'

For in neither case is the songster seen: with true art the minstrel is left for the imagination to supply, and this subtler

artist, Imagination, can furnish voice, form, motion; only one of which three could be given by the painter.

These pictures were in the Winter Exhibition; hence, no doubt, their suggestion of the absent bird-songs was the more valued. For perhaps these, like other delights, are the sweetest when not possessed, but only remembered and longed-for.

That remembrance, however, of Winter, will serve, by contrast, to freshen our enjoyment, as we start, on this warm March day, for Bramley Wood, to descry and collect the old familiar bird-songs as they come back to us in the Spring. To collect these and the flowers, I say, in the heart's cases and herbarium, for use when Winter comes, and woods are dead, and bird-songs gone. Better to collect them so, than merely to crowd the staircase and the Hall with stuffed, silent birds, or to encumber your shelves with dried, brittle, brown 'specimens;' which can never suggest the quick, never-still, bright-glancing inhabitants of the bushes, or the fresh, juicy, sweet-breathed blossoms. For the heart keeps these collections all fresh and full of life, and if a picture, or a poem, or a strain of music, does but summon them up, why, there they are in a minute. Though they may have seemed to be laid by and forgotten, yet at the magic call, lo! the heart is a lane of primroses, or a copse of bluebells; the lark is high in the heaven, and the thrush answering the blackbird out of great white sheets of the may.

We soon settle down to matter-of-course with the bird-songs, when once they have really all come back; and we plod on our preoccupied way, hearing them without hearing, unless, indeed, one day-note of a nightingale should, in a moment,

thrill the heart into attention. But there is no doubt that, at first returning, the silver minstrelsy of the woods is welcomed by many. And we never grow too old to feel a heart-kindling and a brightening of the eye, on that mild November day, when we start, and listen, and—yes, it *is*, the first Thrush-song breaking the meditative misty hush of the landscape. Autumn is stringing the woods with tears, and the first gripe of Winter has ere now pinched to death the more delicate garden flowers; but, even before his reign has begun in earnest, here is a voice which prophesies of his overthrow. Then the frosts come in defiance, and the last leaves spin down, and the snow-sheet falls, and the thrush is silent as though dead, and resistance seems overcome, and Winter's reign established. An observant eye will, however, still detect a speckled clean breast, flitting into alternate concealment and sight, behind the bushes in the shrubbery, and rustling the counterpane of dry leaves, under which those many little dull green points are crowding out of the frost-held ground. But his song is kept in reserve for a time. And it seems that Spring is close at hand, and that the year is indeed turned, when next you hear him, high on the boughs of that tulip tree, large against the pale blue sky, singing out, loud and clear, from early morning to dusk of a bright February day. And the dry leaves have huddled away from the searching wind, and left the brown moist beds, over which trembles a surprise of delicate white cups, where the blunt dull-green points had been.

But I mean now to muse in a fanciful way about the characteristics of these returning songs, and the teaching that

may be gathered from them. Canon Evans' little book, 'The Songs of the Birds,' might seem to have preoccupied this ground, but the treatment will differ, if the idea be the same.

To what, then, shall we liken the song of the Thrush? Different temperaments of men and women may well be illustrated by the variety in the character of the bird-songs. In the thrush's song, then, I seem to hear the utterance of the spirit of the strong and happy Christian. He has never been troubled with any doubts; the dark dismays and hidden misgivings of other minds are without meaning to him. Clear and glad, and untroubled, and strong in faith, the soul of this man sits, as it were, upon wintry trees, above few trembling flowers, under a pale still sky, and sings from the early morning to the dusking eve an unwavering, undoubting, happy song. A song in which there are not weird mysterious depths of feeling, nor ecstatic incomprehensible heights, but in which there is ever an even tenor, a steadfast sustained gladness, an unchecked unvarying trust. A song, perhaps, not of the highest intellect, but of the firmest faith. Here are no dark questionings, that must be content to pause for an answer hereafter; no evil suggestions, fiery darts which the shield of faith must ever be upheld to quench. There is, perhaps, almost a hard ignoring and turning away from minds otherwise fashioned; minds full of anxieties and searchings, that are troubles indeed, heavy troubles, it may be, but not indulged doubts; struggles, but not defeats, because faith upholds where sight fails. These sing more broken snatches of more passionate music, amid thicker branches, and in the dusk; while the thrush-spirit, unknowing of these fierce alternations, sings out,

up there upon the naked bough, clear and distinct against the blue soft sky.

There is a wild stormy note which must detain us awhile from our March wood. It comes early in January; and on stormy days, under thin driving clouds, you may hear short bursts, as though the broken song of a husky blackbird, flung from the ivy-clad top of some tall, ancient spruce-fir. This is the note of the Missel-thrush, or Storm-cock. He seems rather to exult in the disturbed sky, and swaying boughs, and passing gleams and showers. There is a wild beauty, tempered with a *little* harshness, in the short sharp snatches of defiant and militant song. In him I find a type of the religious controversialist and disputant; the watchman set on his tower amid storms and lowering days. Such watchers there are, and they are useful to detect and descry the insidious approach of error. Controversialists-born, as it were, you shall ever hear their sharp short utterances under a stormy sky: and while you value the note, you will often detect and deplore some touch of harshness that grates upon the heart, some falling short of the mellow flute-like tones of Love.

But on our way to the wood, and as we pass through this meadow, a Skylark springs up, and flutters higher and higher; fountain-like, as it rises, scattering about its silver spray of song. Very soon the baffled eye wanders about, searching after it for some time in vain, pleased at last to recover the dim black speck in the grey sky.

I suppose that the picture of which I spoke above gives the natural embodiment of the song of the lark.

‘Heigh ho! daisies and buttercups,
Fair yellow daffodils, stately and tall;
A sunshiny world full of laughter and leisure,
And fresh hearts unconscious of sorrow and thrall.’

Up into the sky, bright thoughts and dreams, quivering wings, swelling throat, hurrying ecstasies and crowding notes of joy, impatient, yet impossible, to be uttered. Careless flowers upon the lap,—withering, are they? But there is a worldful more to be had for the gathering. Oh yes, the lark’s song is that of the young heart—young enough to stop short at the attainment of simple gladness. There is not yet upon it the sweet hush even of love and sentiment, the upward soaring has no alternate dip and rise: the quick beat of the wings no pause; the bright flash of song no dyings-down into shade. Wonder at life goes hand in hand with joy in it; all is new and all is delicious; all is hope, and nothing is disappointing; the whole widening prospect is one of beauty and glad surprise. The year is in its early Spring, and has never so much as heard of Autumn yet; nor can guess, nor cares to try to divine, what those old brown leaves can mean, out of which huddle the thick primrose clumps. Higher and higher, and brighter and brighter, and gladder and gladder, and more and more impetuous the thronging notes, and more and more untiring the ecstatic wing. And God loves to see this, for He gave the feeling; and we may perceive that He has allotted to most things a young life of fresh colour and unmixed joyfulness. Kittens and lambs, and Spring leaves, and young children—they all sober down soon enough—and well it is, we believe, that they should. But let us not grudge them the short hour of pure lightness of heart, that

was God's gift; nor hunt for ripe fruit among the sheets of blossom; nor dull with our heart's evening twilight the first flush of the morning; nor desire, in the song of the lark, the thoughtfulness of the blackbird—far less the moan of the dove. Never let our aim be to *check*, let it be only to guide, and to tend, and to develop, the heart's songful gladness, pointing it, indeed, heavenward; or, again, ready, with our careful experience, to tend the germ from which some gust has stolen its white petal-wings.

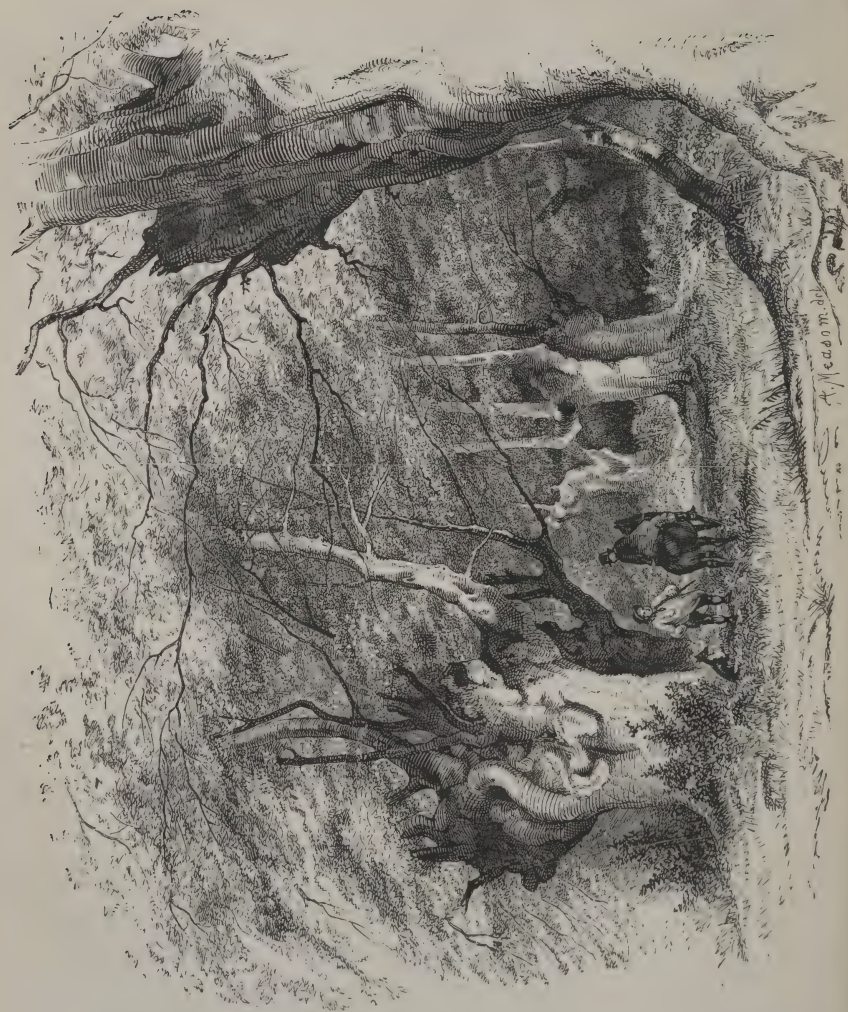
I spoke of the Blackbird. And here, as we near the wood, towards which for some long time we have been walking, we catch the smooth, rich, lyric fragments of this deep-hearted poet. Less openly, freely, fearlessly confident, and exulting in an unclouded soul, than the thrush,—there is something exceedingly fascinating in the intermitted, but not broken song of the blackbird. The pauses which sever the stanzas of his song seem well suited to its lyric character. There are in these separate and finished verses the polish and completeness, also the richness and liquid flow, of a set of stanzas of 'In Memoriam,' and moreover, something of their wild mournfulness, and tender, deep questioning thought. The blackbird's song is that of the grave, mature mind, highly intellectual, somewhat touched with sadness, but more with love, and that has had to battle hard through life to keep both faith and love unimpaired.

'The blackbird's song at eventide:'

thus it is described, and, in truth, it seems the passionate earnest utterance of one who knows of the tornado-difficulties

which have blown down unrooted trees, and yet has himself possession of that faith which can control into music notes that make a jarring in undisciplined minds. The riddle of the painful earth has often wrung the heart of this man, but his sorrowful thoughts concerning it have shaped themselves into these rich utterances of yearning love. This trumpet gives no uncertain sound; the speaking is clear, and distinct, and unfaltering. You are, as I said, reminded of the controversial storm-bird by its tones, but all that would have been harsh in its outspoken truthfulness, is mellowed and softened by an exquisite overmastering charm of tender and patient love. So that the blackbird's song is that of mature faith, which has met and vanquished anxious questionings, and which, if that of a controversialist at all, is only that of one upon whom old age is stealing, and whom experience has made gentle and patient; and yearning for souls has made passionate; and love of Christ has made tenderly and invincibly loving. And so when it thrills out clear and full from some hidden quiet retreat in the evening time, even those who think that there is cause for old grudges against the minstrel are arrested reverently to listen to his deep thoughtful loving song.

We are at the wood now, at last. We have followed a pleasant stream that played hide and seek among its willows, and, even while we talked and listened, we have gathered in gleanings of its beauty. And now we cross the narrow plank—parting, to do so, the branches that half conceal it—and enter the wood. There are gemming the hawthorn bushes tiny pink balls ready to burst into vivid buds; but the trees and



A. Medom del.

underwood are bare, except for the willow catkins and the hazel tassels, or perhaps the dull green of the elder in a tuft here and there, certainly, the early leaf-bud of a twining honeysuckle. But the pale smooth ash saplings, tall and slim, and silver-grey in the sun, with a narrow shadow-edge, the branches studded with brown-black buds; and the golden twigs of the white-stemmed birch; and the warm light brown of the hazel boughs; and the red of the cherry,—these make the wood, though bare, yet neither dull nor colourless. And here, farther in, the many stems are fringed and bearded with the hoary and abundant growth of lichen, cool as the bloom on a greengage, against the pale orange which still lingers in ragged patches upon the six feet stalks of last year's bracken.

Certainly there is, all around us in the wood, much material for musing. But we have come hither with a special object in view. For this is the thirteenth of March, and by this time the first of the train of those songsters, that, to escape our Winter, fly to warmer shores, ought to have returned. So, all ears, we proceed over the crisp leaves, disturbing the bobbing rabbits. And there! I heard the note—simple enough, yet pleasing even in itself, and sweet as being the forerunner of songs more rich. *Chiff-chaff*,—this dissyllable gives this Willow-wren's note and name. There is not much in it, may be, still it is the little tuning-fork of the coming concert. And we are reminded by it of some gentle spirit which longs and tries to say a cheery and a hopeful word to a heart whose lot has been cast under wintry skies; that which it repeats may not indeed be very new, very powerful, or very varied; still, it is accepted and loved for the sake of its truth and affection.

This bird has a relation, due some few days later, whose song, though but little more pretentious, is yet a great favourite with us. I call it the laughing Willow-wren; and indeed its note does at once suggest a small silvery peal of merry light-heated glee. Again and again, peal after peal; flitting through the boughs, almost the tiniest of slim birdlings.

‘Gaiety without eclipse,’

it certainly is, and yet it does not weary us, this ceaseless ‘silver-treble laughter.’ A song which has its parallel in some life, gay and bright and glad from first to last; hiding for a sobered moment from a shower or a storm, but anon and on a sudden recovering its innocent glee again. Delicate and slim, and easily frightened, but never long troubled; very winning and lovable; too tender and pretty for the hardest hand to crush; never doing huge deeds in the world, but of the same value that a fugitive sunbeam would be in a heavy and gloomy wood, or a daisy on a bleak down. Keeping the Child’s heart through the Woman’s life; feeling sorrow lightly, and with an April heart; disarming anger or harshness by its simple gleeful innocence; frail, yet safe, as a feather, upon the whirls and eddies of life. Laugh on, light and cheery heart, amid the jay’s harsh dissonance, and the blackbird’s thought, and the thrush’s strength, and the dove’s sadness! Amid Life’s gravities and stern realities there is a grateful place for the gleams of a glad-hearted song like thine!

What variety there is in the character of the bird-music! Hark, for a moment, at those wise, solemn caws, and watch those sedate, respectable, gravely-glad Rooks sailing across

this opening above us; so black and cleanly painted against the filmy blue. *Caw!* This is the voice of a steady respectable mediocrity, that by reason of its deep, portentous gravity, and weighty utterance, and staid appearance, might be almost mistaken for philosophy. True, the utterance, if profound, is not remarkable for variety; but then manner will often make



up for lack of matter. And it is something to have one maxim or apophthegm which may be fitted to every case. To all the world's customs and businesses, its problems and aspirings, its cries and laughter, he gravely and meditatively listens. And when you eagerly await his verdict, he puts his sapient head on one side, looks at you out of one eye,

‘And says,—what says he? *CAW!*’

The young impatient askers, the subtle and patient tracers of truth's hidden vein, will chafe at his sedate utterances, and, in time will take their confidences elsewhere. But he can get on without them, and will never want for company of his kind. Raised above all intellectual excitements, and never in a hurry, the rooks step side by side with stately dignity over the scarred earth; or wing a heavy and cautious flight towards the trees; or sail serene in the still blue. For though there may be times when

‘The rooks are blown about the skies,’

this haste is involuntary, and must no doubt for the time much discomfort the methodical and stately traveller. And no doubt such characters are as useful ballast in the world, and well counterbalance the full excited sails, and the mad fluttering pennons above them. Commonplace, unruffled, happy Christians are these; with some they gain reputation for wisdom, with some for folly; but they go evenly on; not much troubled by sunshine or storm; not caring to enter into the dusks and gleams of the more passionate songsters and thinkers; ever with one quiet and not unmelodious answer: a life rather of deeds than of words. *Caw*, to all your spasms and heart-searchings,—and then I must just away to my work. Up in the tall trees, bending and swaying to break off the twigs for the nest; practical, if not colloquial; early at work in the morning, and at home in good time in the evening; a life not excited nor greatly eventful, but that has its own quiet, serene lesson.

A day or two hence we might hear a notable and dis-

tinguished visitor to the woods and shrubberies. Even now, as we walked on, I have once or twice paused, half fancying that I heard his voice, and ready to do honour to such a guest. For while you are momentarily expecting to hear the Blackcap, the warbling of the meditative robin has, here and there, a note which puzzles you. You follow out the voice, and there, on an elm branch, is the dark eye, and the warm breast, and the comfortable shape; and you feel half ashamed to have mistaken such a familiar friend for a stranger.

The Blackcap is indeed a wonderful little warbler. So small and so energetic; you know him at once; thrilling song and swelling throat; brown body and whitish chest and jetty head. There are those who trace a resemblance, in its quick joyous utterances, to the Nightingale's song. If so, certainly the melody gives but a suggestion here and there, and cannot claim a sustained and continuous resemblance. Shall I be unkind to the sweet little songster, if here I write that the song has its counterpart in the life of unequal Christians? Many there are who, now and then, in thought, word, or deed, seem to touch some perfect chord, and then disappoint the intent listener by sinking down to the more commonplace again.

A moment, and there seemed a strain of angelic utterance, but it was not sustained, and you turn away disappointed at a more homely song which would otherwise have pleased you well. You do not look for Seraph notes in the hedge-sparrow's song, or the wren's chatting, or cheery trill; and so you are well content with these. But high hopes unfulfilled become disappointment, and you feel an injury in having to resign the exalted idea which you had taken up. Until, at last you see

yourself in the sweet but unequal and inadequate song; and learn to reverence and to love even the ever-failing and unsustained effort after higher things. Thus, ay thus, do you aim high, and ever fall below your aim; there is one touch of heaven, and a hundred of earth, in the broken and unsustained song of your life. And yet you would rather strive with hopeless yearning after the Nightingale's music, then acquiesce content with the lesser warblings, which accomplish the less that they attempted. Sing on, then, little bird, to an answering heart! In your song I read the rises and falls, the endeavours and failings,—the aspirings and rare glimpses of attainment, which are the sweet exceptions, and the commonplace and every-day Christianity, which is the rule—of a life that would fain become the song of an Angel, but that scarce reaches the homeliest warble of the simplest wayside bird. Let us aim high, if we still fall below our passionate striving; let us never acquiesce quietly in less than Perfection; hereafter—who knows? who knows?

It is evening now, as we wend our way home. A thin sickle of light is barred by the slender topmost ash twigs, and the sky is deepening to that cold, clear dusk, that foreshadows twilight. We hear a quiet song, far away—the Woodlark's note always seems far away—You would have asked me the name of the not-generally-familiar songster, but I have just given it. '*That*, the woodlark? Well, I never heard, or never noticed it before.' I dare say. But it is a quiet, saintly song; a heavenly voice, serene and clear, never passionate; a twilight, still, calm song, removed far away from the world's

bustle, and deeply imbued with wisdom and melody from a Land far beyond this eager fevered strife. It is not glad, nor



sorrowful; nor so much thoughtful as spiritual. It images to us that life which, separated from the world, is yet not ascetic;

unobtrusive, yet fascinating when once perceived and heeded ; simple, somewhat as is the language of St. John, but with unfathomable suggestions and revelations when you come to study and to learn it. Holding aloof from controversy and strife, there is in it a divine peace, an entranced contemplation, a serene and peaceful uplifting of the soul. Perhaps the writings of Archbishop Leighton best give words to my ideal of the woodlark's song.

But those throbbing coos must stay our foot ere we quite leave the wood. The Dove—its voice has ever been held to be the embodiment of love ; troubled, but not passionate ; earnest, but not of earth merely. It has a melancholy vehemence, a sobbing urging of its cause, that is rather the voice of one seeking the good of another than its own delight. There is a tremulousness, a trembling fulness that might be that of one bidding farewell in death to some very dear friend whom he fain would win to the right and happy path, but of whom he sadly stands in doubt. There is such abundance from which to speak, such love and such mournfulness in saying it, that you smile with the tears near your eyes, on suddenly recollecting whither fancy was leading you, and that it is, after all, but the old old story being beautifully and melodiously told. For you caught a sight of the ash-blue wing, the mild eye, and swelling crop, and of the mate on a branch close by ; and so your fancy was overturned.

But there is one song which we shall not hear yet, as we return home from the wood ; of which, nevertheless, some words must be said. Yet what words have even the greatest word-masters yet found for the NIGHTINGALE's more than

earthly melody! What other song has even a hint of the instantaneous and riveting fascination that is produced by one note of this? It is a voice which speaks, not to the ear, merely, nor to what we call the heart, merely, but straight at once to that mysterious divine thing within us which we call the spirit.

And so it represents that recognition of, and yearning for, an ideal perfection and beauty; a recognition and yearning which many own, but few are able to express. And thus we start to hear it represented and embodied in sound without language, and, without knowing how, acknowledge a dumb potential music in ourselves which is closely akin to this superhuman and unearthly song. And we cannot, if we try, exactly define its character; some call it joyous; more, sorrowful. But perhaps there is a hint in it of something within us higher and deeper than either of these; else how can it thus startle and electrify our being? At least it tells us of melody that we cannot yet grasp, or fully understand, of beauty and harmony and perfection that is not yet our own. And I liken it to the raptured speakings of the prophet, or to an echo of the angelic messages seldom brought to earth.

Well, it is difficult, and perhaps hopeless, to strive to interpret the songs of these little minstrels of God. After all, each heart will set them to words of its own. And by leading others to do so, perhaps these musings may best fulfil their end. Many a one who would have appreciated them, does yet miss the pictures in earth's great gallery, and the music of earth's great concert, for want of a finger to point him once to

the one, and a hand on his shoulder to arrest his attention for the other. And it is worth regarding pictures at which God is working, and to listen to songs which yet remain in a saddened world, exactly as He first taught them.

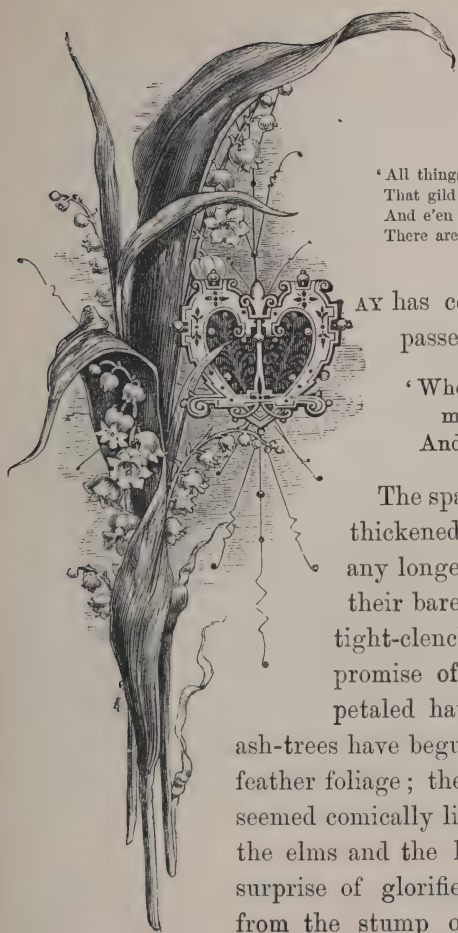


THE MAY-DAYS OF THE SOUL.

AND now,

As though 'twere yesterday, as though it were
The hour just flown, that morn with all its sound,
(For those old Mays had thrice the life of these,)
Rings in mine ears. The steer forgot to graze,
And, where the hedge-row cuts the pathway, stood,
Leaning his horns into the neighbour field,
And lowing to his fellows. From the woods
Came voices of the well-contented doves.
The lark could scarce get out his notes for joy.
But shook his song together as he neared
His happy home, the ground. To left and right,
The cuckoo told his name to all the hills;
The mellow ouzel fluted in the elm;
The redcap whistled; and the nightingale
Sang loud, as though he were the bird of day.

A. TENNYSON.



'All things are new, the buds, the leaves
That gild the Elm-tree's nodding crest :
And e'en the nest beneath the eaves :
There are no birds in last year's nest !'

AY has come ; the waxing year has
passed the sweet April time,

'When all the wood stands in a
mist of green,
And nothing perfect.'

The sparsely-gemmed hedges have thickened now, so that you cannot any longer see the gardens through their bare ribs ; and little bunches of tight-clenched buds give abundant promise of the sweet-breathed, shell-petaled hawthorn flowers. The coy ash-trees have begun to fringe over with their feather foliage ; the ruddy bushy growth that seemed comically like whiskers, at the base of the elms and the lindens, has changed into a surprise of glorified green ; the low shoots from the stump of the old oak-tree in the hedge bring out their wealth of soft, crumpled, young red leaves ; the elders on the banks have gotten a deep, full garment of green upon them now ; above the ash-hued

stem of the maples there is a numberless array of small maroon-tinged fists; the tender beech-leaves edge the low boughs that are spread out just above the grass.

The birds are full of importance, and excitement, and enjoyment. The robin has his 'fuller crimson'; the 'livelier iris shines upon the burnished dove.' The black rock sails lazily with broad wing up in the blue sky: he, too, has his



high nest to attend to; but life, on such a day as this, imperatively demands to be enjoyed. The copse rings with the laugh of the little willow-wren; the chaff-chaff ceaselessly announces his presence; the wood-pecker cries as he leaves tree for tree; the black-cap, not singing just now, makes that

‘check, check,’ of his, like the striking of two marbles together; the cuckoo, besides telling his name to all the hills, has also a low, cooing, wooing voice for his mate; also another cry, as of a startled blackbird, but flute-like and liquid.

‘Flattered with promise of escape.
From every hurtful blast,
Spring takes, O sprightly May, thy shape,
Her loveliest and her last.’



A sweet grey tint, that had begun to overspread the bare side of the copse, is deepening into such a sapphire sheet, that our ungrateful hearts half lose or retract the regret they felt, when the fair young hazels and the tall thin ash-wands bowed in the winter before the cruel bill-hook. Only lately, it

seems, on the way across the fields to the station, a delicate fairy mass, the light lilac of the 'faint sweet cuckoo-flower,' had spread its kindly screen over the hacked and maimed stumps of the fallen wood. But the hyacinths take their place now; and, after these, we expect the bright glow of the rose-campion; and, after these, quite a garden of tall spires of the foxglove, alternating from pale to darker red, with, rarely and preciously, a clustered sceptre of milky white.

But while we look forward to the rose-campion and the foxglove, later flowers of the year, we do not forget the fair flowers that have yielded their places to our darlings of the present, even as these will yield theirs to the favourites that shall yet 'dance into light, and die into the shade.' And where 'all grass of silky feather' deepens now, and yellow rattle, and purple and freckled lilac orchis grow, and fringed hawkbit, and snake-weed, and other many-hued meadow-flowers, we gratefully remember sometimes, as Wordsworth loved to do, the sheet of glory that March gives us, when she recalls for us that old 'field of the cloth of gold' with her thousands of

'Daffodils

That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty.'

How the familiar lines can 'make these dry flowers live.'

'I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er dales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils.
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

‘Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.’

So the poet ; and how could he but be, even in March, other than of a May-day heart, amid such a very May wealth of flowers ? It was a light, a gleam, a possession that he thenceforth held ; a sweet, living landscape of the heart, a landscape alive, indeed, not only with colour and light and shade, but (which no limner’s art can attain) with ceaseless gleeful motion.

‘I gazed, and gazed, but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought.’

No ; for often, when ‘the gentle race of flowers’ were in their graves, and perhaps shallow snow, streaked with patches of brown land, slanted away under a pale grey sky, even at such times that wealth and glory, and abundance of the Spring suddenly would

‘Flash upon that inward eye,
Which is the bliss of solitude.’

And then, even in a lonely hour, a time of dulness and depression, a time when this sad life seemed saddest ; in such a time even, that glad gleeful golden landscape would come back, with something of the light and joy of a kind deed done, or a strong word said ; and the pale snow would pass away, and the depression lift its brooding mist, and well might the possessor of such a landscape say that—then,

‘Then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.’

But we pass from thoughts of ‘Lent lilies’ to May-day thoughts again. Life has its May-days, as well as the year. They come, sometimes; rarely to many, but exquisitely beautiful when God sends them—the May-days of the soul. The times when the November fogs and winter frosts have



passed away, and the clear sun shines down in its glory on the land; the times when the bare brown trees have become ruddy or golden, and have then flushed into crowded variety of leaf; the times when the flowers, that had been thought to be buried for ever, dawn like a smile upon earth's pale and furrowed face; the times when youth's forgotten glow comes

back, and a hint of the vigour to which dreams seemed realities, and impossibilities easy, stirs the sluggish sap of the soul. Such times there are, I say, when the mists of November have departed, and the frosts of the succeeding months, and the bitter winds of March, and the flooding tears of April; and lo, it is the May, with its lavish promise and exuberant life, and ecstatic beauty! Times when illness or sloth or languor or lack of power no longer chill the soul that is indeed eager to burst into leaf; times when we are winged, when the hardest toils are easy to us, the heaviest stone rolled away; times when soul and body seem in perfect accord, and tongue and limb and eye instantly execute the least mandate of the ruler within; times when the ship obeys the lightest touch of the man at the helm; times that come like holidays scattered through the dull half-year of school-days; times of exuberant life and spirits and powers that visit us rarely, sweetly, now and then,—as May-day comes in the year.

I often think how little we use life thoroughly; how little we really live our life; how seldom we are in the humour to carry out its great and solemn purposes: how we let its opportunities fly by us, as thistledown on the wind. Why are we not *always* denying ourselves, taking up the cross, and following our Master? Why are we not *always* on the watch for every occasion in which a word may be said, or a deed done, or a thought thought, that shall be a protest for Christ, in this vain and sinful world? Why is God's love but a rare wintry gleam, and never a steady Summer in our soul? How is it that privileges which angels regard with marvel, stir scarce at all the dull sap of our spirit? Think, for instance,

of such a thing as Prayer; what a wonderful and beautiful thing it is! To kneel, an atom in creation, at the Throne of the Almighty! To be able to bare our hearts to Him, and to feel sure that the least throbs, as well as the great throes, are perfectly appreciated, felt, understood, sympathised with, by that awful, loving mind!

And yet, how wintry our hearts are in our prayers! how seldom they burst into exuberant flower! how constantly the sky above us seems pale and heavy, and dull and impenetrable, and our hearts beneath abiding in a winter sleep! Or (so to speak,) a snowdrop here and there wanders out, and now and then a pinched primrose—not flowers enough for even the poorest garland.

But that is not all; not only in religion is it that we are more often winter-hearted than May-hearted. I have heard of an artist who used sometimes to keep his sitter waiting a whole morning, and at last send him away, unable to win the right humour to his heart, and feeling that his work would not be well done were it forced work. And in reading Haydon's touching and instructive 'Life' you may often find traces of how difficult is this mood to attract, when it has not a mind to come.

So, too, in composition, whether grave or light, how different a thing it is, according to our mood! How delicious a thing is it when the soul has a May-day, and when the pen cannot overtake the mind! when

‘Thought leaps out to wed with thought,
Ere thought can wed itself with speech!’

when ideas throng

‘Glad and thick,

As leaves upon a tree in primrose time!’

when we seem to see,

‘Smiling upward from the page,

The image of the thought within the soul!’

But these times, at least after one has written many reams, are



comparatively rare times, and it is more often December than May within us. A subject that seemed full of leaf when it occurred to the mind some weeks ago, in a May-day mood, stands often a stripped bare winter tree when we sit down to work it out.

Yes, in most of the business of life that is not mere routine and machine-work, no doubt the soul has its May-days—its

times of *being in the humour* for its work, and of doing that work easily and glibly. How many a clergyman would endorse this, merely in the every-day case of taking a class in his school! Words, earnest and abundant and interesting, throng forth at one time; at another, how barren the mind, and how unready the tongue!

And now, to what do these thoughts lead us? I think to two considerations—one of warning, one of encouragement.

The warning is an obvious one, and yet one much and often neglected. Let such times of warmth and light and glow and possession of blossom be not only *enjoyed* but *employed*. The soul's Flower-time should never be allowed to pass away *without having left some noble fruit set*. It is a matter-of-course fact, that the May-days of the soul are most abundant and most glowing in youth, the May-time of life. And, in connection with this whole subject, let us recall, with an addition, Longfellow's verse:—

‘Maiden, that read'st this simple rhyme,
Enjoy thy youth: it will not stay;
Enjoy the fragrance of thy prime,
For, oh! it is not always May.’

This is gentle and tender advice; and far am I from wishing to correct it, or to do otherwise than allow it, in its degree. Only there is deeper and more grave advice to be given *with* it, not *instead* of it. It is well to enjoy the soul's May-time, but only well if it be *employed* as well as *enjoyed*; otherwise it will pass, and no trace be left. We may make a great May-day show by merely gathering our flowers and weaving them

into garlands; and there may be much dancing and excitement and glee. But then it seems purely and simply sad to see them next day lying neglected, limp, and withering, in patches and driblets, on the ground; whereas, although the apple-tree and the primrose bank may look sobered and saddened when their blossom-time is past, you yet know that all trace of that sweet adornment is not lost; they are busy henceforth, maturing fruit and seed from the germs that the bloom has left.

Therefore, to return to the principal thing, namely, service of God; remember, when the blossom time comes, or returns, that its fairy brightness is evanescent. It must pass, therefore employ it; enjoy it, but put it out to usury; let it not fade and fall without having left a germ of noble fruit behind. When the heaven seems open to prayer, when the dull sky has cleared, and, thick and sweet as May-flowers, the earnest longings and ready words burst from your erst barren heart, seize the auspicious hour; let not it pass unemployed. Do not merely taste, but exhaust, its sweetness. When God seems to make His listening apparent, refrain not; besiege His throne with prayers, supplications, praises. And again, when the heart has thawed from its deadness and indifference, and a very May-gathering of zeal for God, of love for God and man, of high and holy yearnings and longings and resolves and purposes, crowd upon the winter sleep of the soul; oh, then, indulge not in a mere sensuality of spiritual enjoyment; stay not, as it were, at mere revelling in the warm sky and in the profuse upspringing of flowers; set to work to fix, in that propitious hour, some germs of fruit, some careful reforms, some holy resolves, some earnest and lofty purposes, some self-denials, some real

pressing towards the mark. Prayerfully and painfully set to work, so that, by God's grace, when the beauty has gone, the use may remain, and the boughs bend with fruit that were once winged with bloom.

Yes, we know, many of us, I say, these May-days of the soul: times when the love of God seems natural to us, and our hearts overflow into a spontaneous love of man; times when hard things are easy, and Apollyon in the path, or Giant Maul coming out of his cave, rather stirs the soul to exultation than daunts it with dismay; times when God seems to us not the cold abstraction we are wont to make Him, but a Reality; when we can fancy the Saviour beside us, as in old days He stood beside St. Peter or St. John; times when it seems a light thing to spend and to be spent for Christ's sake and the brethren; times when the World has no allurements and the Flesh no power, and Satan seems already beaten down under our feet; times when we go out to face the hardest duties with no secret desire that the call on us may not be made, but rather with grave steady resolution and with face set like a flint. There are times, I say, when God's image on the coin seems to shine out for a while, clearly and brightly, from the defilement and dulness of marring sin and sloth; times when, Samson-like, we rise from sleep, and the fetters that have hitherto tied us down from life's great deeds become upon our shoulders like as tow when it hath seen the fire. Yes, May seasons there are for the soul, in which there is a press and hurry of blossom, blossom that is well and fair if it be secured for God.

For, note this—it is *not always May*. The glow will pass, the sunlight die, the flowers will fade, the bird songs sink into

silence. And, if you have not profited by that gleam of heaven which opened upon your soul, you are certain to have lost by it, especially when such a warmth, such a light, broke, by God's grace, through the dull sky of a cold and worldly life. If any message from God have warmed your bare heart into leaf and bloom, beware how you let the golden opportunity remain unemployed. Beware lest the east wind return, and nip and scatter the frail petals ere the germ of some good fruit be formed. Life is ever offering to us Sibylline books, and very often we have at last to give the price of as much effort in old age, for the attaining of a poor service to God, as we should have had to give long ago, for a full, rich, hearty life-long serving Him. Late, however, if they come, or early, *employ* the excitements, the May-warmths of the soul. 'Excitement has its uses; impression has its value. Ye that have been impressed, beware how you let those impressions die away. Die they must: we cannot live in excitement for ever; but beware of their leaving behind them nothing except a languid, jaded heart. If God gives you the excitements of religion, breaking in upon your monotony, take care. There is no restoring of elasticity to the spring that has been over bent. Let impression pass on at once to action.'

How sad a spectacle that of a paralysed will, that cannot carry on emotion into deeds!

'So, on the lonely beach when sinks the tide,
Some weary wave collects its fallen pride,
And rises high, determined to regain
O'er the bare sands its former haughty reign;
But, all its strength exhausted, moaningly
It sinks but deeper in the gloomy sea.'

The *warning* was obvious: somewhat less so, perhaps the *encouragement*. Still, this violet is to be found if we part the brambles, and seek it among its leaves. The May feeling is delicious—is, indeed, a foretaste of Heaven—when hard things seem easy to us, and the face of duty is scarce distinguishable from that of pleasure. Prayer is sweet, sweet indeed, when it is easy to pray; praise is delicious when it seems almost the spontaneous growth of the heart. It is less difficult to speak a painful word, to perform a painful duty, in those moods when the uplifted heart almost exults at having hard work to do. It is little to deny ourselves when some gleam of Heaven has so exalted us that the world and the flesh and the devil have nothing to offer which can turn us from the ecstatic contemplation of Christ, and of the Home whither He has gone to prepare. But is prayer more acceptable, is praise more beautiful in God's sight when the heart is all in flower, or when it is winterly indeed, but exceeding sorrowful at this, and sadly trying to gather for God if but a snowdrop out of its wintry beds? Is it more acceptable in God's sight to speak a true word when the heart is braced and strong, and the effort small; or *still to speak it* when the heart is shrinking and weak, and the effort great? Is the deed of love or of justice, or of self-denial, noblest when most easy or when most difficult to be done?

Concerning all this, God knows; and He sends the May-days, and He permits the dull days and the bitter winds. Let us serve Him through both, and then all will be well. It seems to us that we *ought* always to have a May-day in our heart for this service. And yet, perhaps, indeed almost

surely, He does not mean that this should be in this life of discipline. Here it must not be always easy and delicious to serve Him. Here we must follow Him through cold and through warm weather, through calm and through storm, toiling for Him up the hill Difficulty, as well as setting pleasant steps in the quiet valley.

Religious feelings are very variable; but rarely, comparatively, a May-day comes: the flowers with many of us are few, and the sky overcast, almost generally. Let us, then, use diligently the warm blossom-time, when it is with us, but let us not be dismayed when it passes from the soul. *Perhaps* the best words we say are those that seemed to us the worst, and the teaching that sank most into the heart was that which we thought weakest and most inadequate; thus may God be pleased, while He deigns to use us and to accept our work, yet to keep us humble. Perhaps the service that was so hard to render, and in which we had so to fight against listlessness and wandering thoughts, may, if still earnest, prevail or please more (who knows?) than that which seemed to fly up at once full-fledged to Heaven's gates. If, though limping, we still limp on with all our might, we may, in spiritual things, be really making as much progress as when we seemed to be skimming the ground; for God gives both the wings and the crutches. Of course I am not supposing that the hindrances to love and service arise from want of watchfulness, that suffered the world to creep in, or from want of prayer for the Help which alone is sufficient for us. But, generally, we must make up our mind to have more days of weary toiling through the desert sands than of refreshments at 'Elim, with its palms

and wells': only, when the rare refreshment comes, it should have braced us for the monotonous and arid march, for the time when we must leave the pleasant spot behind and labour toilsomely on again. And, if May-days of the soul come but seldom now, and it is oftener difficult than easy to serve God now, fear not, fail not, my Brother or Sister. Rejoice that God gives thee something not easy to do for Him, and think of a time, beyond this brief life, when it will be ever natural and instinctive to love and serve God. A time when it *will* be '*always May.*'



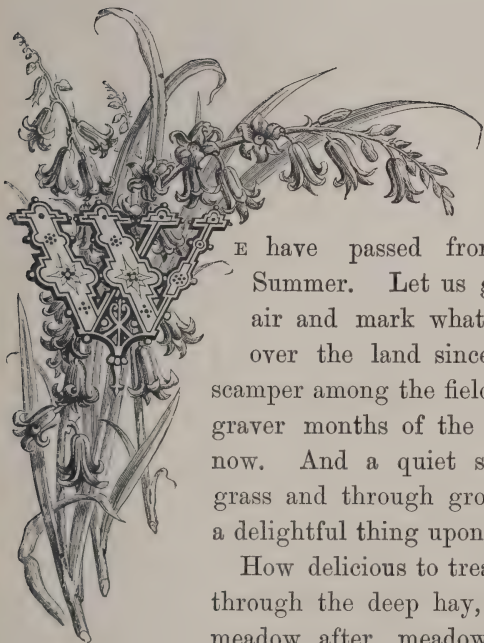
SUMMER DAYS.

FATHER, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me,
And the changes that are sure to come
I do not fear to see;
But I ask Thee for a present mind,
Intent on pleasing Thee.

I ask Thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching wise,
To meet the glad with joyful smiles
And wipe the weeping eyes;
And a heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathise.

I would not have the restless will
That hurries to and fro;
Seeking for some great thing to do,
Some secret thing to know;
I would be treated as a child,
And guided where I go.

A. L. WARING.



‘Consider the work of God.’

WE have passed from late Spring into Summer. Let us go out into the balmy air and mark what changes have passed over the land since we had our Spring scamper among the fields. It will befit these graver months of the year soberly to walk now. And a quiet sauntering walk over grass and through growing corn, is in truth a delightful thing upon a Summer’s day.

How delicious to tread the narrow parting through the deep hay, just ready to be cut; meadow after meadow full of tall, silky, waving grass; here a patch feathery, and of silvery lilac hue; here the rough crowfoot, here the drooping oat-grass; here trembling, delicate pyramids; here miniature bulrushes; and, choice and rarer, the graceful quaking grass, with its thin filaments, and its fruit shot with faint purple, and pale green, and light brown. Numberless flowers—gold, and rose, and crimson and lilac, and amethyst—these smile up at you close to the path, and give a sweet hint of stronger

colour, where they group far away throughout the neutral hues and many unpronounced tints of the grass.

‘Heavy clover heads
Bow down beside you, and your feet brush through
A tangled maze of long and fragrant grass,
Just flowering towards the hay-time, and engemmed
With purple and pale orchis, and with fringed
And tasselled flowers of gold, and, o’er them all,
The great white ox-eyed daisy. Far away
Slants the young green of cornfields, and the depth
Of rich lucerne, and meadows white for hay,
Or crimson with the trefoil flower.’

You spring over a stile, and, sweet surprise! come upon a field half-mown. It is the first cut grass you have seen this year,—the first deep ranks of close tall growth falling before the scythe,—the first fragrance of hay that has delighted you; and the first waft of this is, to the scent, what the first note of the cuckoo is, to the ear. There the deep swathes lie in long rows, the innocent sweet flowers looking up at first with something of sad wonder, but soon drooping in a death which shall not be called untimely, because it is useful, and following on completed work. Of it we may say with the wise king, that ‘being made perfect in a short time, it fulfilled a long time.’ And, even as a loved memory after a holy death, the scent of the dying grass and flowers lingers sweetly in the soft air.

Well, we surmount another stile, and enter a wheat-field. How beautiful the myriad stalks and the broad drooping leaves, of a more sober, bluer green than that of grass! I always notice that as soon as the hay is made, or making, the

full bulging sheaths of the wheat begin to open, and to divulge the secret wealth of the green ear. The pointed flag falls over it; but very soon it bursts the swaddling bands, and rises proudly above the now obsequious deposed leaves, as an heir growing out of childhood asserts himself above his deferential nurses. And then the whole wheat-field stands in blossom, the little trembling stamens escaping all over the husks, and the great width of tall ears begins its solemn stately waving and swaying, and its undying whisper in the faint warm summer airs.

And through the long colonnades there are here also sweet and fair flowers: the bright pimpernel, the dull-grey cudweed, the glad speedwell, the small blue forget-me-not, the white feverfew,—these are the low carpet growth. Then higher, and like to illuminations hung through the columns, there are the rich blue corn-flower, and the purple corn-cockle in its green star-shaped cup: and last in order, but almost first in beauty, the glorious scarlet poppy, with its satin-black eye, —a flower of dazzling splendour, but calumniated and libelled beyond my endurance. ‘Flaunting poppies,’ indeed! Why, they are the drooping banners of the great army of the corn! Here they are waving out in all their glory: here they are folded up (somewhat crumpled) within that green case, out of which they are gleaming, just ready to be unfurled for the march. I love the Violet—no one better; but I protest against the folly, and, in a minor degree, injustice, of instituting an inane comparison between it and the Poppy, to the discredit of my favourite of the corn-fields. A better lesson might be taught by pointing out how each fulfils the

duties of that state to which it has pleased God to call it: the sweet violet among its leaves, like the modest wife at home; the brave poppy among the open and wealthy corn-fields, like the husband called out into the business of the thronged world.

This is a digression, however. Let us get back to Summer days, and the fallen grass, and the wide wheat-fields in flower.

Many days have not passed before that flower falls, and the delicate paleness of the new-born ear passes away, and the corn-fields settle down to the grave work of the year.

‘Long grass swaying in the playing of the almost wearied breeze;
Flowers bowed beneath a crowd of the tawny-armoured bees;
Sumptuous forests, filled with twilight, like a dreamy old romance;
Rivers falling, rivers calling, in their indolent advance.’

That was all very well in the time of the year’s early manhood, scarcely distinguishable from youth. But a more prosaic gravity has toned down those romantic feelings, and it has discovered that there is work, grave work—work sometimes a little wearisome and dull—to be done. The fairy lightness and greenness, the delicacy and exquisite freshness, of the year, have passed away. It is not Dream-land any longer—not a scene of faint rose-flushed or dazzling white blossom, but of hushed, sober colour, and of somewhat of monotony and sameness. The fair Bride fruit-trees are clad in dark garments now, and busy with their families of little unripe things, that have to be educated into ripeness and usefulness. The oaks are no more clad in ‘glad light green’ or very red leaves, and the elms have toned down even the little brightening up of summer growth at the end of their branches, all into one quiet

dust-dulled, dark hue. And so with all the trees; and under the tall growth of the copses there is not the play and dance of myriad butterflies of sunlight in soft meadows of shade; but the shadow is almost gloomy, and the stillness is quite solemn. Thin tall grass or broad grave ferns have taken the place of the sheets of glad primroses, and bright wood anemones, and azure hyacinths, and rich orchis, and rose-campion.

There is no disguising it: the freshness and first energy of things has spent itself and gone, the landscape is dulled and dustied. A little while ago every day was different; now every day seems much the same. There is not the constant progression, the still developing beauty, the ever new delights of every new day. New birds to greet, new clothing for the meadows, new carpets for the woods, new glories for the trees; all these

‘Faded in the distance, where the thickening leaves were piled.’

And the year has done with its extravagantly profuse promises, its eager pressing on to some ideal and impossible beauty not yet attained, never to be attained, though it would not believe this, in those old inexperienced days, when it cast away blossom and freshness of leaf as things that did but impede it, in the impatience of its hurry after that Perfection which is a dream on earth, though it be a reality in Heaven. Realised also in Him, in whom earth and Heaven have met; this stooping to the tangible, and that raised to the sublime.

Yes, the year seems at a stand-still now, and sobered down, and sedate, and hushed. Above all, it is silent. Those ecstatic melodies, those ‘pæans clear,’ that rang out through the

groves—the song of the willow-wren, the thrush, the blackbird, the blackcap, the nightingale—all are silent. Even the little robin has no voice for Summer days; only the yellow-hammer reiterates its short, plaintive, monotonous note on the dusty wayside hedge.

‘Dear is the morning gale of Spring,
And dear th’ autumnal eve:
But few delights can Summer bring
A poet’s crown to weave.

‘Her bowers are mute, her fountains dry,
And ever Fancy’s wing
Speeds from beneath her cloudless sky
To Autumn or to Spring.

‘Sweet is the infant’s waking smile,
And sweet the old man’s rest;
But middle age by no fond wile,
No soothing calm is blest,’

Sweet Summer days! I am far from meaning to depreciate you, or to deny to you the meed of much beauty and calm delight; but it is true, nevertheless, and must be conceded, that the poet’s complaint has some ground of reason. We miss something in Summer days: it is the rule of things in this world. Attainment must ever disappoint; reality is another thing from the image of our dreams. The finished painting is not all that the first rough sketch hinted and shadowed forth. Spring may be high-spirited and eager—Summer must ever be grave, and hushed, and sedate.

And what then? Something is missed: but is nothing found? What is the year doing in the gravity, and monotony, and silence of Summer days? For our life is much like that of

the year. It has—how often has it been said,—its Spring and its Summer, its Autumn and its Winter. We, too, pass out of youth, and excitement, and impetuosity, and hope, into manhood, and gravity, and calmness—and disappointment. What, then, is the year doing in this stage of its life? If we look aside from our own experience to its example, what does that example teach us?

The question ‘What is the year doing?’ suggests the answer to our inquiries. The year *is doing*. It is gravely, quietly, perseveringly *at work*. And the lesson of earnest, hearty, steady work at that which God has given us to do—work hearty, if a little dull and monotonous—this is the lesson taught by Summer days.

Work, steady work, dry, monotonous work, aye, this is the portion of Life’s Summer; this succeeds its dream-time, this precedes its rest. Yes, in truth, the Spring anticipation and eager energy have gone. The autumn repose has not yet come. The year is gravely, and steadily, and prosaically at work now; its ardour and ecstasies calmed, its wild impossible hopes toned down, its grace of blossom vanished. All vegetation is busy, maturing seed and fruit, sober grain and useful hay. The earth, like her child, the ant,

‘Provideth her meat in the Summer,
And gathereth her food in the Harvest.’

Toiling in the dust and heat; toiling without rest, wearily often, uncheered by songs. For the little choristers of the trees are themselves grave and sedate now, and busied with their fledglings, and with the care of rearing their family. There is little change, save a deepening of colour; the morning

finds the earth still ceaselessly at work, and in the tender evenings and grey nights, the glimpsing lightnings and the intent stars disclose or behold the same scene :

‘Rapid, rosy-tinted lightnings, where the rocky clouds are riven,
Like the lifting of a veil before the inner courts of heaven :
Silver stars in azure evenings, slowly climbing up the steep’ :

What do these still discover? What but

‘Corn-fields ripening to the harvest, and the wide seas smooth
with sleep’?

Let Summer days then, as, one after one, they greet us and depart, teach us their wise, but unobtruded lesson. The Summer-time being the time of grave steady work, and there being also such a time in our lives, a time of dust, and heat, and toil, when our spirits sometimes seem to flag, and the very sameness of labour brings over us a depression, and a lingering backward longing after the time of blossom, and of clear new verdure; there being this resemblance between us, let us examine the year’s work, if perhaps we may gather some hints from it for ours. *How* does the year work? and how should *we* work, when the first zest that made work easy has gone, and the time of rest is on the other side of our labour?

The year, then, works *thoroughly*, more implicitly obedient than man to this teaching of its Maker :

‘Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, *do it with thy might.*’

God seems to have made, in all the wonderful animal and vegetable growth which surrounds us, some to honour, and some to dishonour. Even as with nations, there were the chosen people, and there were those left yet degraded—and as

with individuals, there are those whose work is to evangelise a world, and there are those whose work is to follow the plough, or to order the household—so it is with plants, and flowers, and trees.

And from this point of view we shall find that they have much to teach us in our work. How thoroughly it is all done, and with the might; the noble as well as the homely work. There are some plants busy maturing canary-seed and beech-mast, some maturing strawberries, and peaches, and pines. But each does *its utmost*, and the *work* of the inferior degree is equal in quality with that of the higher. The shepherd's purse and the thistle-down are as perfectly and exquisitely finished, as are the apricot and the grape.

And this strikes me as leading up to a cheering and beautiful thought—to a thought which has often occurred to me in reading the parable of the *Talents*. There is, let me remark, this difference between this parable and that of the Pounds: that in the one case the *work* was equal in quality, bearing exactly the same proportion to the advantages, which were dissimilar; in the other case the advantages and opportunities were the same for each, but the *work* was unequal and greatly differing in quality. Thus each has its separate teaching.

And in this parable of the *Talents*, the same heartening thought came to me as that which I spoke of as being wafted from fields, and trees, and gardens, on the breath of Summer days. It was cheering, and a matter of much thankfulness, to recollect that it was possible, in a low condition, and with less advantages, to serve God in the same proportion with the greatest of God's saints; to fight as well and as nobly in the

ranks as any officer could do who waved his soldiers to the charge. It was, I say, very comforting to read, after

‘Lord, Thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more’;

and the ‘Well done’ that followed—it was exceedingly sweet to read, farther on,

‘He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, Thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.’

and then to hear just the same ringing, glorious words, ‘Well done!’ words that come as a burst of joy-bells across the heart. For I said to myself, ‘Cheer up, and be bold,—humble, insignificant, lowly though thou be, and sorrowfully, impotently, longing to do great things, to trade diligently, for Him who died for thee and rose again. Yea, be of good courage, and do even thy best with that thou hast. The one servant had ten talents to bring, the other but four, yet cheerily, bravely, modestly, did he bring them; the amount was different, *the work was the same*. Each had wrought in the same proportion. He with five talents had indeed doubled them. But he with two talents *had likewise doubled these*.’

Therefore men, my brothers, women, my sisters, let us thank God and take courage. Let us not repine if our sphere be narrow, and our work seemingly insignificant; let us not look enviously at those with great talents, and grand opportunities, and wide work. Let us take heart, as we look at the tiny wayside plant, and at the laden fruit tree, all equally at work, under the sun, in the quiet Summer days. There is no caprice, but there is much to surprise us, in the allotment of service in

God's world. So, art thou an oak, capable, as it seems to thee, of great deeds and noble fruit? Scorn not, however, to spend thy life producing and maturing homely acorns, if thus it please God to employ thee. Art thou a lowly strawberry-plant,



weak, and easily trampled, and (thou deemest) capable of nothing worthy? Shrink not, at God's bidding, to endeavour to fashion rich and precious fruit, which if thou art patient

and faithful, God's rain shall nourish, and His sun shall ripen. Such an oak might St. Paul have seemed, chained to the Roman soldiers, yet I wot he then produced acorns, whose branches have since overspread the world. Such a lowly plant was Moses, deprecating God's behests at the burning bush. Yet I trow that was indeed noble fruit that he was enabled to mature.

For the comfortable thought is, that we work not in our own strength, nor drawing from our own resources. God supplies strength and material, and then undoubtedly it is for us to use them. Yet the very principle of growth is His gift; and so also are the sun, and the wind, and the rain. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. But with Him, everything.

'I can do all things,—through Christ which strengtheneth me.'

Let us then be brave-hearted and true-hearted, and learn this lesson from the earth's work under the sun. Never to envy nor to repine, nor to be amazed at life, but just to give all our heart to the maturing and perfecting the work which God has entrusted to us to do for Him—if in the garden bed, the choice fruit; if by the wayside, the small seed which He has prepared for us to tend. Let us work *thoroughly*, in these short Summer days.

Another hint from the year's work. It works leisurely, bringing forth fruit *with patience*. Thus the poets sweetly describe its work:

'Lo! in the middle of the wood,
The folded leaf is woo'd from out the bud,

With winds upon the branch, and there
Grows green and broad, and takes no care,
Sun-steeped at noon, and in the moon
Nightly dew-fed; and, turning yellow,
Falls and floats adown the air.
Lo! sweetened with the Summer light,
The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow,
Drops in a silent Autumn night.
All its allotted length of days
The flower ripens in its place,
Ripens, and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,
Fast rooted in the fruitful soil.'



Thus flower, and leaf, and fruit, do their part thoroughly, and expect God's blessing patiently, and trustfully leave all to Him. There is no hurry, though there is no idleness or slackness. Again, as a contrast to our heat and fever, and haste, and distrust, regard the sublime calm of nature :

'Sweet is the leisure of the bird,
She craves no time for work deferred;
Her wings are not to aching stirred,
Providing for her helpless ones.

'Fair is the leisure of the wheat,
All night the damps about it fleet,
All day it basketh in the heat,
And grows, and whispers orisons.

'Grand is the leisure of the earth;
She gives her happy myriads birth,
And after harvest fears not dearth,
But goes to sleep in snow-wreaths dim.'

Yes, as the Great Teacher said (and the saying seems to me, if I may so speak, one of the most suggestive of even *His* sayings), the earth brings forth her fruit *with patience*. And now, what a contrast is this to *our* work! How distrustful, how impatient we are! How apt to be in a hurry! We would have the whole long Summer's work done in the first short Spring day. We want the leaves perfect, and the blossom gone, and the fruit not only set, but ripened all at once. We cannot ourselves bring forth fruit with patience, nor be content to wait its gradual growth and ripening in others.

I give two examples of this. One is from the education of children. Here, we want the ripe fruit, too often, before the bud has even well developed for the bloom. What unnatural precocity do some well-meaning religious parents bring out, and exult over, in the little delicate undeveloped minds that God has given to their care. It pains me to read the stories that are so prized by some people. They force upon the mind the sense of such utter unreality. What experience has that

infant life gathered of the deep feelings and inward struggles, the defeats and victories, the repentances and recoveries, the depressions and ecstasies, the wrestlings in prayer, the astonishments, the dismays, the failings, and the attainments that are familiar to the veteran in the battles of the Lord? And yet we would make him talk the language of the soldier of a hundred fights, when, only very lately brought into the camp, he does but sit among the tents, hardly yet even seeing or hearing

‘The distant battle flash and ring.’

Experience will come, but until he has had it, why should you require its tokens? The war is at hand, but is it wise to bid him pretend to its trophies while its grim earnest is scarcely yet to him a dream? Parents, anxious parents, heartily do I sympathise with your yearnings. You long to know certainly that your child is indeed a faithful and obedient child of God. Nevertheless, to hurry the work is often to mar it. Forced fruit, if you get it, is poor and flavourless, compared to the natural growth. And how much falls blighted from the bough! You have seen fruit, also, red before full grown, and while others about it were green. You know, however, that this is not ripeness, but only its caricature. And I have seen such a mere painful caricature in the talk and conduct of the child. Be content,

‘Learn to labour,—and to wait.’

Put in the seed watchfully, wisely, diligently, not rashly, nor over profusely; pray before, and during, and after the sowing; and then trust to God, and wait. Dig not up the seed to see

if it is sprouting; despair not if through long winter months scarce any tender blade appear; suffer that the ground which you have diligently, painfully, prayerfully sown, should *bring forth fruit with patience.*

The other instance of impatience and over-haste is found in the desire and endeavour for holiness. How many that are but beginners in the race, chafe and fret because they cannot be at once at the goal. How many a one, but a babe in holiness, expects to attain at once to the stature of a perfect man, without the gradual growth, the patient succession of day and night, the sun and shower, that go on through this dusty toilsome Summer of our life. And depression, discouragement, sometimes entire loss, results on this unwise hurry. The seed tries to grow with unnatural rapidity, and, therefore, having no root, it withers away. Oh wait, and work, and trust, seedling saint, and fear not but that God will send the full growth: yea, if thou wilt abide earnestly patient, even bid thee bend with fruit an hundredfold for Him. Only remember, God's order is, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.

Yes, let us take comfort from the thought of the gradual growth and ripening that goes on in Summer days. Every day's sun, every night's dew, adds a little. And at last the grain bows heavy and ripe, and the fruit reddens upon the branch, and weighs it towards the ground—that was once but a thin weak blade, or a small crude, sour, green apple-germ.

And—for an ending of the parable of Summer days—working thoroughly, and working patiently, the earth also

works *steadily* on, and in spite of discouragement; of the waking from many dreams, and the experience of many failures. Its songs have gone; its freshness is overgloomed; and dust has gathered upon its light and glory. Frosts, and caterpillars, and blights, have marred much; and the tender poetry and the early fascination of Spring is over now.

But it goes on steadily, in the dry Summer glare, in the drought, and dust, and silence; patiently, uncheered by showers, and with many a leaf curling, many a fruit dropping. Though life often seems monotonous, and prosaic, and dry, the earth none the less steadily and persistently, and without giving up or losing heart, toils on.

Ah, thus in our Summer days, in the time of our manhood, when life's poetry has fled, and we are not that we wished to be, and we do not that we wished to do; and the romance, and the glory, and the glitter of the once distant warfare, when

‘Among the tents we paused and sung,’

has resolved itself into the stern realities, and prose, and smirch, and dust, of the long toilsome march, the weary watching, and the sob and sweat of the struggle and the contest; when this is so, let us gravely, solemnly settle down to the, at first sight, uncheered duties and blank programme of the work of Summer days. Yes, when the dull every-day routine of dry work is near to making us heart-sick and over tired; when

‘Still in the world's hot, restless gleam
We ply our weary task,
While vainly for some pleasant dream
Our restless glances ask,’

let us remember that, whatever our work be, so it be honest, God gave it us to do, and the homeliest act, or repetition of monotonous acts, is ennobled, if the motive be noble, and the labour steadfast and brave—if it be done heartily and well, as to the Lord, and not as unto men. Think of St. Paul making tents—yea, of the LORD CHRIST in the carpenter's shop—and weary not—oh sick at heart, and disappointed of youth's sweet Spring dreams of high imaginings!—of the work—however homely, however monotonous, however dull and prosaic—which yet God hath given thee to be done.

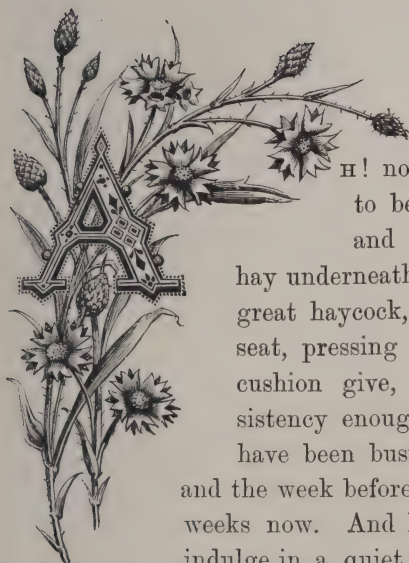
Friends, let us work in Summer days. The Spring is past: we will not, therefore, spend the golden hours in useless regrets. The Autumn has not yet come. But the Summer is with us now. Beyond it there may be a land of Beulah, even here, when the dust, and the toil, and the strain pass by in some degree, and something of the old-remembered brightness of colour and of beauty flushes over the land. Whether or no such an autumn-quiet be by us attained; the Summer will pass, and the great winter sleep will come. And beyond that there shall be Spring without its evanescence, Summer without its toil and weariness, and, may be, an Autumn without its melancholy and death. Beyond the short labour of Summer days, '*There remaineth a rest for the people of God.*' Let us, therefore, *labour*, that we may enter into that rest.



MUSINGS IN THE HAY.

BUT he that would have abiding glory and thanks, must turn his eye another way for them. All men desire glory, but they know neither what it is, nor how it is to be sought. He is upon the only right bargain of this kind, whose praise (according to St. Paul's word) is not of men, but of God. If men commend him not, he accounts it no loss, nor any gain if they do; for he is bound for a country where that coin goes not, and whither he cannot carry it, and therefore he gathers it not. That which he seeks in all is, that he may be approved and accepted of God, whose thanks is no less, to the least of those He accepts, than a crown of unfading glory. Not a poor servant that fears His name, and is obedient and patient, for His sake, but shall be so rewarded.

ARCHBISHOP LEIGHTON.



H! now I am seated as I love
to be, the June blue over me,
and the sweet, warm, new-made
hay underneath. On the shadow side of a
great haycock, here have I selected my
seat, pressing down and feeling the soft
cushion give, until it has attained con-
sistency enough to resist my weight. I
have been busy, very busy, all this week,
and the week before that, and indeed for several
weeks now. And I have earned, and mean to
indulge in, a quiet long afternoon, and perhaps
evening, in the hay-field. I have a book with me, but I do
not pledge myself to read much. I have not come out here
for the purpose of reading, not with intent to do much, indeed,
but just to sit and muse, nay, chiefly to enjoy the feeling of
being able to rest. To feel that there is, or shall be, for the
remainder of this day, so far as I can choose, no call upon
anxious heart and weary brain; no parish troubles; no sick,
whose silent appeal in the distance forbids the pastor to sit
still; no sermon, no article, to think out or to write; no letters
to pour into that insatiable post-office,—the true sieve of the

Danaids; not even any gardening to do or to superintend; nothing but to sit on the side of a haycock 'in the leafy month of June.'

We may go on and on in the round of every day's business, on and on, unpausing, till we drop: the mere energy of spinning may keep us up, though perhaps on a weak and tottering peg; and work begets work: * and busy day will chase busy day as the sails of a windmill; and we hardly dare stop, because we foreknow how we shall then have a long bill to pay, all the arrears of those fatigues and that weariness that we bade stand aside as we laboured on; and we know that if we once pause to give them a hearing, it will be hard work to set the heavy machinery going again. Do we not often feel that to go on working, is to be able to work; to pause is to collapse, and to feel incapable? Still, in fact, we make life go farther by careful trading with the interest, than by lavishly spending all our capital. And both for purposes of devotional retirement and of necessary recreation, it is well sometimes just 'to sport our oak' (to speak in Oxford phrase) upon the noisy and importunate throng of things clamorous to be done, yet which, if discharged, would but give place to as many more. I could dizzy my brain with thoughts of business that I might do, and want to do. But, for some weeks, I have worked on and worked on, hoping to satisfy all claims; waiting for a pause, which never would come; and now I will no longer wait for it, but make it. Away! crowding calls, for this afternoon, for all the rest of this day. The wrestling, restless, toiling, moiling, weary world is quite shut

‘πόνος πόνῳ πόνον φέρει.’



out from me behind this Andes of haycocks. I hear the sharpening of scythes, and their long sweep in the bending swathes; once or twice in the afternoon a cuckoo sails over me with broad wings, and voice which stammers now near the end of his monotonous but prized oration; there is a scattered rain of larks' songs falling all around; and from a hedge near at hand, the short plaintive cadence of the yellow-hammer's few notes.

Grass is always beautiful,—thus I am led to think as, leaning on one arm, I inspect the material of my couch. Beautiful after the winter lethargy, and when it grows lush and green, vividly green, and taller and taller under the showers, at the roots of the pines that step forward here and there from the shrubberies into the lawn. Beautiful again, when the scythe and mowing-machine have destroyed *this* beauty, and substituted that of the smooth, well kept velvet sward. Beautiful, growing in the meadows, and deepening for hay; a sweet close under-growth of white or dull pink clover; of orange-flowered trefoil; of purple self-heal; of bright yellow-rattle; of small red orchis; of orchis pale lilac specked with dark; and, more desultory and thinner, above these the tall grass and flower-stalks; 'all grass of silky feather'; bright rose ragged robin; white ox-eye daisy; brimstone toad-flax; tall buttercups; pale pink centaury; numberless varieties of fringed flowers, all yellow; tall slight sorrel; tougher dock, and bobbing myriads of the ribwort plantain, to which we are all, when children, very Henry VIII.'s. Beautiful, when the scythe has laid all this variety in broad, lowly lines upon the whole face of the field; and the mowers advance yet steadily upon the long yielding ranks. Beautiful when the

green has turned grey, and the brighter colours of the flowers are dull, the clover not yet brown, only faded; the yellow tassels showing, as they droop, the paler under-wing of the closing flowers; the buttercups spoiled of their square varnished petals, and showing only the green spiked ball, the miniature head of Gog or Magog's mace. Beautiful to lie in the grey mounds of the soft, fragrant, new-made hay, dying, if this be to die, so graciously, and sweetly, and blessingly; lovely in life, and sweet in death. Beautiful when even this bloom-grey has gone, and we shake out from their close-pressed sleep the loose masses of the tawny hay, and brown leaves and flowers, all, however, still fragrant, and full of hints in winter days, of the warm Summer. Beautiful when the last cart is carried, and the rick is being thatched, and a pale bright under-growth has given to the dry hot field, in the parched summer-time, something of a faint imitation of the early green of Spring.

So I lean, listless, idle, and examine my couch. Much I find to examine in it; besides the embalmed flowers, there is a small zoological garden—brown ants climbing up the pole of an upright grass stem; leopard-spotted lady birds; alligator grasshoppers; woolly-bear caterpillars; bird-of-paradise butterflies. I am left alone with these, and so can be quite quiet; for I am in the rear of the haymakers.

‘All in a row

Advancing broad, or wheeling round the field,
While, as they rake the green-appearing ground,
And drive the dusky wave along the mead,
The russet haycock rises thick behind.’

And my couch is one of these same pale hills that they have done with. My wife is away with the children: I shall not therefore run the risk of being buried, with shouts, under the piled heaps of the hay. My servant has gone out for a walk: I thus escape the apprehension of seeing her advance into my field steering her way among the haycocks, and, with hand shading her eyes, looking about all over the wide glare for me. I can lean on this arm until it is tired, then change to the other, then lie on my back and watch the fleecy blue, with handkerchief spread for fear of insects; then turn over again, and resume my inspection of the grass. I am thus particular in description, because I would fain carry my hay-field into hot cities. A few distinct details may help out many a memory; and the clerk really in the baking, staring city street may yet, if his imagination be my ally, lean back among the yielding warm-breathed hay to muse with me upon the grass and upon its teachings.

For it is, after all, impossible to be absolutely doing nothing. The mind, that busy alchemist, works on and works on in the worn laboratory of the body, and transmutes gold into earth, or earth into gold, as the case may be, in its peculiar crucible. And so, since I cannot but muse on the hay into which I am closely peering, I may as well also jot down my musings.

Flesh, and grass: how natural the now common-place connection between the short-lived beauty of the two! It is one of those common-places, however, which new thoughts could not easily better. The hay-fields with their life, and glee, and

loveliness of flowers, just now; and now, the faded mounds! The generations of men in the gaiety or toil of the world, and then the quiet churchyard with its 'shadowed swells'! Half a year for the one growth, and sometimes less, sometimes more, for the other; but all lying in the bending swathes at last. Take the extreme case:

'All the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years.'

Was flesh like grass then? What! a thousand years akin to the life of a few summer months? Yes, closely akin; banded together by the last words of the chronicle of both; for how ends the short history of the longest liver of mortal men?

'— and he died.'

Yea, the growth, the ripening was longer in progress, but the scythe came at last:

'The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry?

All flesh is grass,—and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field;

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth.'

And again:

'Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.

He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down:

He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.'

And again:

'As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone;

And the place thereof shall know it no more.'

And again :

‘In the morning they are like grass which groweth up ;
In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up ;
In the evening it is cut down, and withereth.’

Oh, faded couch on which I lean, here are witnesses enough of the highest authority of all, to establish a brotherhood between us ! I look at these hands which can write and work, I look at these limbs which can rise and go, I consider the brain which can busily toil :—and from these I turn to regard the dry heap that once was living grass ;—and I think how slack, and void of energy, and lifeless will these also lie, in the long swathes which ever and ever fall before the advancing mower, Death.

“ Consider well,” the voice replied,
“ His face, that two hours since hath died ;
Wilt thou find passion, pain, or pride ? ”

No ; each lies passionless in that especial long line of mown grass that we call his generation :

‘ Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished ;
neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that
is done under the sun.’

Flesh and grass : are they not akin ? These ever-succeeding generations ;—how the grass still grows after every mowing.

‘ One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh ; ’
—there is not a word of abiding at all, says Archbishop Leighton. But, however, there is a notice of constant succession, and the grass grows as fast as it is mown. Load after load is added to the store of Eternity ; but the mower, Death, knows no pause. Ever and ever the tall grass and the sweet

flowers bend before that industrious, unsparing scythe. Where is the glad growth of fifty years ago; and where the life that preceded that; and so on, back to Adam? In long fallen ranks they lie, generation parallel with generation, all across the wide field of the world's history. Flowers, and plain grass, and wholesome fodder, and prickly thistles, and poison weeds, they bowed at the edge of the scythe; so far they are equal:

‘There is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath. This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all.’

Yes, all lie in the swathes, and are equal there; the almost bitter saying of the wise man, to whom wandering from God had made even wisdom sadness, is so far true. True with regard to the field after the mowing; true while we look on Death, but not applying any longer when the eye of Faith dwells on the Resurrection. A very Life shall revive, or a very Death shall wither, each stalk of the myriads that lie waiting in the field, each one in the place where it fell.

I cannot help being also by this history of mowing and growing, reminded of the special field of each human life, with its ever springing, ever falling hopes and dreams. One day life is to us a carpet of brightness and glory; the next, the withered lines lie desolate on the bare field. Yet look closer, and you will find already, to clothe the scarred meadow, the tender green of a new growth appearing. A constant succes-

sion, ever mown and still growing; every year and often in the year a fresh attire, however the heart, when that really commonplace desolation was new to it, refused in dismay to believe in the possibility of any further growth. Fond thing! even while it thus protested, *the grass had already begun to grow*; and it was in vain to try in sullenness or self-respect to check the smiling flowers that *would* crowd up over the ruin. Many a one of us could join in saying, of some past sorrow, that,

‘When less keen it seemed to grow,
I was not pleased—I wish to go
Mourning adown this vale of woe,
For all my life uncomforted.’

But this could not be, except in the case of a hypochondriac. In healthy lands the growth cannot be checked.

‘I thought that I should never more
Feel any pleasure near me glow’:

and again:

‘I grudged myself the lightsome air,
That makes men cheerful unaware;
When comfort came, I did not care
To take it in, to feel it stir.’

After that devastating flood you shrank from the thought of taking in the dove with the olive-leaf: you had rather sit moodily alone. Very well for a time, but ‘will you nill you,’ the second growth begins to cover the scars. And soon you can tranquilly and thankfully say,

‘But I have learned, though this I had,
’Tis sometimes natural to be glad,
And no man can be always sad,
Unless he wills to have it so.’

For it is an ordinance of God that the mown grass shall keep on growing.

But, of course, especially, and above all other similitudes, the analogy before indicated is that which connects this brief life of ours with the grass of the field. We are, above all, alike in our *frailty and evanescence*.

‘All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.’

How exquisitely Archbishop Leighton comments upon this text! An idea so anciently true as almost to have become, in our ordinary speech, common-place, blossoms into new beauty in the atmosphere of his holy thought. So, however, in the teaching of the Bible, do themes which appear to ordinary thinkers but bare rods, yet bloom and bear fruit abundantly in the shrine of a congenial heart.

‘All flesh is as grass.’ ‘Yes,’ he expands it, and ‘grass hath its root in the earth, and is fed by the moisture of it for awhile; but, beside that it is under the hazard of such weather as favours it not, or of the scythe that cuts it down, give it all the forbearance that may be, let it be free from both those, yet how quickly will it wither of itself! Set aside those many accidents, the smallest of which is able to destroy our natural life, the diseases of our own bodies and outward violences, and casualties that cut down many in their greenness, in the flower of their youth, the utmost term is not long; in the course of nature it will wither. Our life indeed is a lighted torch, either blown out by some stroke or some wind; or, if spared, yet within a while it burns away, and will die out of itself.’

A new idea is here given us as to the mowing. This poet makes the scythe to be the sweeping of disease, or accident, or violence, that every day prostrate their thousands; accidents or violence represent the mowing; and there is, beside these,—the withering too. As though a field of deep grass should be left to itself, unmown; yet how soon then would its life and light and laughter depart, and a skeleton array of thin, sere, shivering colourless stalks meet the October winds. Even if unmown, we must wither, and either will at times seem saddest to us, until we remember that this field is but the field of Time, and that the eternal God is ordering all.

But Leighton proceeds to develop another exquisite thought, which to many would lie hidden and unperceived in the short and simple word of God—‘All flesh is as grass, *and all the glory of man as the flower of grass.*’ On the hint of this latter member of the sentence he speaks :

‘There is indeed a great deal of seeming indifference betwixt the outward conditions of life amongst men. Shall the rich and honourable and beautiful and healthful go in together, under the same name, with the base and unhappier part, the poor, wretched sort of the world, who seem to be born for nothing but sufferings and miseries? At least, hath the wise no advantage beyond the fool? Is all grass? Make you no distinction? No; *all is grass*, or if you will have some other name, be it so; once this is true, that all flesh is grass; and if that glory which shines so much in your eyes must have a difference, then this is all it can have—it is but the flower of that same grass; somewhat above the common grass in gayness, a little comelier and better apparelled than it, but

partaker of its frail and fading nature; it hath no privilege nor immunity that way; yea, of the two, is the less durable and usually shorter-lived; at the best, it decays with it—*The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.*'

Yes, grass and its flower—loveliness, might, wisdom: Helen of Troy shares the fate of the meanest weed; Julius Cæsar and Napoleon lie with the rank and file; Solomon in his glorious wisdom is at last now equalled with those lilies of the field, the grass which to-day is, and to-morrow is laid low. We in the rank beneath, we the mere grass of the field, look at and admire the glory above us, the flower of the grass, the choice gifts of intellect, of power, of beauty: but even as we gaze, and before the scythe can come, or the sun can wither it, we miss it—'The flower thereof fadeth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth':

'The wind passeth over it, and it is gone,
And the place thereof shall know it no more.'

'The instances are not few, of those who have on a sudden fallen from the top of honour into the foulest disgraces, not by degrees coming down the stair they went up, but tumbled down headlong. And the most vigorous beauty and strength of body, how doth a few days' sickness, or, if it escape that, a few years' time, blast that flower!'

And, sadder still, we must feel it to be, the ornaments of the mind are as short-lived; and we watch with the keenest regret, great intellects quenched by decay or death, and minds that are the most stored with knowledge and learning cut off in a day.

'Yea, those higher advantages which have somewhat both

of truer and more lasting beauty in them, the endowments of wit and learning, and eloquence, yea, and of moral goodness and virtue, yet they cannot rise above this world, they are still, in all their glory, but the *flower of grass*; their root is in the earth. When men have endured the toil of study night and day, it is but a small parcel of knowledge they can attain



to, and they are forced to lie down in the dust in the midst of their pursuit of it; that head that lodges most sciences shall within a while be disfurnished of them all; and the tongue that speaks most languages be silenced.'

Yes, and again I look at the jumble of common grass and flower of grass, and bright blossoms all withered, in which I am reclining, and think how our bright days and our common-

place days, our ordinary life and our pageants, fade into dulness even while we live on, and are all swept down at last, as it seems to a superficial thinker, by Death, into one common oblivion. 'What is become of all the pompous solemnities of kings and princes at their births and marriages, coronations and triumphs? They are now as a dream.' And so with our first flushes of success, our earliest tastes of fame, our new ecstasies of love, our wonders and admirations when life was young—where are they very soon? Lying in the mown ranks, void of their living movement and vivid lustre; numbered with the heap of every-day events and emotions; still distinguished from these, still marked as flowers, but the glory of them dried out, under the air of use, and the sun of experience. Precious they are still, and dear, but the dreams of youth are not to Age what Youth imagined them; the hay is valuable and sweet, but it is not that field which the least air could stir into a sea of silky light and shade, and a tossing of myriad colours. It was the Flower of grass, and it cannot be, on earth, but that '*the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.*'

'Would we consider this, in the midst of those varieties that toss our light minds to and fro, it would give us wiser thoughts, and ballast our hearts; make them more solid and steadfast in those spiritual endeavours which concern a durable condition, a being that abides for ever; in comparison of which the longest term of natural life is less than a moment, and the happiest estate is but a heap of miseries. Were all of us more constantly prosperous than any one of us is, yet that one thing were enough to cry down the price we

put upon this life, that it continues not. As he answered to one who had a mind to flatter him in the midst of a pompous triumph, by saying, What is wanting here? *Continuance*, said he.'

Yes, this is the moral of it all, '*we have no abiding city.*' What then? '*But we seek one to come.*' And St. Peter, if he talk, it might seem mournfully, of the fading and dying growth from all earth's sowings, is not really trying to sadden but rather to cheer us. For he has been telling but just now of incorruptible seed; and he sums up the teaching of the fading grass and its withering glory, with these words of quietness and confidence,

'But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.'

And this is always the distinction between the Worldling's or the Sentimentalist's cry, concerning the vanity of human life and of its glory of hopes and loves and ambitions; and the Inspired declarations of this vanity. In the former it is but a wind which comes with a blight and passes away with a wail. In the latter, some better thing is ever held before us, to which our heart's yearning tendrils, gently disentangled from their withering support, may safely cling. And if the vanities and emptiness of Time are clearly set before us, we are offered instead the realities and the fulness of Eternity.

'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof';

yes; but

'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

I have mused away my afternoon, and the sun is near the hills, and this day is falling beneath the scythe, and will soon

lie behind me in the swathe, as I advance upon the yet unmown field or strip, as it may be, of my life. There are in this flowers, and nettles, and thistles, no doubt, and much common undistinguishable grass. Ay, may life in the end, be found to have produced, upon the whole, good and useful hay! Yes; but here the life of man outruns the analogy, for the days that are passed are not done with: they remain dried and stored, either to rise and revive their flowers in far more than their pristine beauty; or to be burnt as refuse and waste. Nothing that God wrought of good or beautiful in us here, but will, fresher and fairer than at first, remain with us hereafter. And there is One for whose sake even the nettles and thistles that mixed with the useful grass and fair flowers, shall have vanished from the story of the lives of those that loved Him, and be counted as though they had never been.

Let me lie back for a little while, as the sun sets, and a cool air fans me, to quiet my heart with this happy trust and calm confidence.



THE BEAUTY OF RAIN.

ETERNAL God! we look to Thee;
To Thee for help we fly:
Thine eye alone our wants can see,
Thy hand alone supply.

Lord! let Thy fear within us dwell;
Thy love our footsteps guide:
That love will all vain love expel;
That fear, all fear beside.

Not what we wish, but what we want,
Oh! let Thy grace supply:
The good, unasked, in mercy grant;
The ill, though asked, deny.



At the time at which I am writing, a soft shower has just fallen. For months we have had scarcely any rain. Even in the hedges with the last few stragglings of their Easter decorations here and there about them, the massed primrose roots have drooped their long broad leaves. The grass and the trees have seemed to remain at a standstill, as though waiting for something. The plough-land has long kept unmolested its great unbroken lumps. The marsh-land has gaped open in huge cracks. The ponds have sunk a foot below their usual mark; the ditches give no savoury smell from their shallow green soup. The roads are like grindstones, wearing down your shoe-leather with myriad-pointed flint-powder, and your patience with loose stones that carry your legs away from your control and supervision. The roofs want washing, the drains want flooding, the butts want filling. When I pour waterpot after waterpot

of water about the roots of some favourite or needy plant, the water runs off the caked ground as though this were a duck's back; or, the mould being loosened, is sucked in, without the chance of collecting into a pool, and, seemingly, without at all allaying the fever-thirst of the earth.

All things and all people want rain: the farmer for his land, the cottager for his garden—a steady three or four hours' downpour, not only such a slight shower as this, that, scarce having browned the beds, is already drying off from them.

Just now it is certain, rain would be welcomed and appreciated, but still even now more for its usefulness, than for its beauty. For the beauty of rain is a thing often missed, I think, even by those who do keep, as they pass through this world, a keen eye for the Creator's thoughts, embodied in beauty about them: poems written on the world's open page by the Hand of the great *Poet* or *Maker*. For, rightly regarded, from the vast epic of the starry heavens, to the simple pastoral of a dewdrop, or the lyric of a bird, God's works are to us the expression of His mind, the language which conveys to us His ideas. Man's noblest descriptive poetry—what is it but a weak endeavour to interpret to less gifted seers the beautiful thoughts of God?

And rain is one of these thoughts—a realised idea of the mind of the Almighty. And since I find, in Great Britain, both in men and in books, a general neglect, if not a rooted dislike, with regard to rain—*rain as such*, and putting out of sight its *usefulness*—I shall devote a few pages to the endeavour to set forth the beauty of this thought of God.

May we play with the words of Tennyson, of Tennyson, our greatest living High Priest of Nature? Of Enid we are told—



‘She did not weep,
But o’er her meek eyes came a happy mist,
Like that which kept the heart of Eden green
Before the *useful* trouble of the rain.’

Here, then, even when he would praise it, he calls it ‘*useful trouble*.’ Elsewhere, indeed, he gives us grand, enjoyable rain-landscapes. Here is one picture, taken from the galleries of his ‘Palace of Art.’

‘One showed a full-fed river winding slow
By herds upon an endless plain,
The ragged rims of thunder brooding low,
With shadow-streaks of rain.’

I do not think that Wordsworth dwells with much frequency or delight on this friend of mine. Longfellow has—

‘The day is cold, and dark, and dreary,
It rains, and the wind is never weary.’

One who sent out, some years ago, a volume of unfulfilled promise, writes—

‘How beautiful the yesterday that stood
Over me like a rainbow! I am alone,
The past is past! I see the future stretch
All dark and barren as a rainy sea.’

And so on, generally; all that is dreary, uninviting, dismal, seems connected in the British mind with rain. In the British mind, I say, for I suppose the want of appreciation of it arises from its somewhat abundance in our climate. But how differently it is regarded by the poets of an Eastern land! How beautiful the description—

‘Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it;
Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water:
Thou preparest them corn, when Thou hast so provided for it:
Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: Thou settlest the
furrows thereof:
Thou makest it soft with showers: Thou blessest the springing
thereof.’

How lovingly it is spoken of! 'That gracious rain upon Thine inheritance,' refreshing it when it was weary; the 'rain upon the mown grass, and showers that water the earth.' How its mention is a signal for thanksgiving—'Sing unto the Lord, who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth.'

To be rightly appreciated in our climate, rain should certainly come after a drought. Most people, no doubt, even then appreciate it because of its watering the crops, or laying the dust. But the true lover of rain regards it not merely or chiefly in this utilitarian matter-of-fact aspect. He has a deep inner enjoyment of the rain *as rain*, and his sense of its beauty drinks it in as thirstily as does the drinking earth. It refreshes and cools his heart and brain; he longs to go forth into the fields, to feel its steady stream, to scent its fragrance; to stand under some heavy-foliaged chestnut-tree, and hear the rushing music on the crowded leaves. Let the drought have continued two months; let the glass have been, at last, steadily falling for a day or two; let, at last, a delicious mellow gloom have overspread the hot glaring heavens; let it have brooded all day, with a constant momentarily yet lingering promise of rain. The cattle stand about, with a sort of pleasing dreamy anticipation; they know rain is coming, and no more muddy shallow ponds, and dry choking herbage for them. The birds expect it, and chirp and nestle in the foliage, important, excited, joyful. Or some one thrush or blackbird, amid the chirping hush of the others, constitutes himself the loud spokesman of their joy. So Keble—

‘Deep is the silence as of summer noon,
When a soft shower
Will trickle soon,
A gracious rain, freshening the weary bower—
Oh sweetly then far off is heard
The clear note of some lonely bird.’

And at last it comes. You hear a patter here and there; you see a leaf here and there bob and blink about you; you feel a spot on your face, on your hand. And then the gracious rain comes, gathering its forces—steady, close, abundant. Lean out of window, and watch, and listen. How delicious! The gradually-browning beds: the veranda beneath losing its scattered spots in a sheet of luminous wet; and, never pausing, the close, heavy, soft-rushing noise; the patter of the eaves, the

‘Two-fold sound,
The clash hard by, and the murmur all round.’

The crisp rustle as the rain drenches the dry foliage of the perceptibly grateful trees, broad pavilions for ever-chirping birds; the refreshed look of the little plants, in speechless ecstasy, receiving cupful after cupful into the outspread leaves, that silently empty their gracious load, time after time, into the still expecting roots, and open their hands still for more. You can hardly leave the window. You come again at night; you have heard that ceaseless pour on the roof, on the skylight, and the loud clashing under the eaves, in the silence, as you went up late to bed. You open the window and let the mild cool air in, and look through the darkness, and listen, for you cannot see. On the vine-leaves above the casement is the steady

‘Sound of falling rain;
A bird, awakened in its nest,
Gives a faint twitter of unrest,
Then smooths its plumes, and sleeps again.’

Your light shines out into the deep dark, and touches the trees just about the house, and gives a dull gleam to some portion of the streaming lines. Unwillingly you shut the window, and still hear, as you kneel and there is silence, the rushing undertone. Or, if a cool breeze arise, sudden bursts of rattling drops come impetuously against the panes, with intervals of dreamy rustling, or in quick succession. You like to hear that sound as you lie in bed; and, besides your unmercenary enjoyment of it, you think of the bedding plants that you have just put out, or of the burnt patches in the lawn, or of the turnip and onion seed; or, with a larger sympathy, you think of the great thirsty fields of corn, the blade yellowing for want of rain; of the mill-stream, so long shallow and inadequate; of the wells in the cottage-gardens about you, and their turbid or exhausted condition. You look forward ere you lose consciousness, to seeing how next day all vegetation will have advanced and appear refreshed.

And when morning comes you look out from your window, as you dress, with a deep sense of luxurious enjoyment. The rain has continued steadily all night, until six in the morning. But it has ceased now, though the warm tender gloom still continues, only just veiling, however, the bright sun, which now and then breaks through it. As you contemplate the scene from the open window, the refreshed look of the rich brown road, that was so white and dusty, makes you long to

sally forth upon it. Tearful puddles smile here and there on the walks; the drenched grass twinkles and sparkles, and reminds you of that exquisite description of 'the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.' And, breakfast over, you walk out, through the garden gate, a little way into the road. There is a peculiar, as it were, *growing* warmth in the air. Everything seems to have attained a week's growth in the one night. You remark the vivid gold-green patches in the hedges. The lime-trees—indeed, all the trees—make with their black wet stems and branches a most effective background for the radiant emeralds that have burst their pink caskets all over them. The corn-blades, the hedge-banks, the drooping boughs, have all a drenched, tearfully-grateful look.

You pass, well pleased, back into the garden again. How well the peas show in the dark mould, and how much taller are they than they were yesterday! The dull green of the potatoes, that appeared but here and there last time you looked, seems now to cover the beds. The little crumpled flowers of the currant and gooseberry bushes have developed all over them into many blossom-laden strings. In the flower-beds the annuals appear above the round sanded patches; and of the bedding plants, no geranium, heliotrope, or verbena droops a leaf. You go back into the house refreshed by the beauty of the rain, as much as vegetation has been by the rain itself. The worst of such a day is, that it makes you feel idle, indisposed to settle down to work, inclined from time to time to saunter out and watch nature chewing the cud of its late refreshment.

But this is only one example of the deliciousness of rain—one, you will say, picked, selected, exceptional. There are, however, many other times at which it is beautiful. It is beautiful when it comes hurried and passionate, fleeing from the storm wind, hurled, like a volley of small musketry, against your streaming panes; and the few tarnished gold leaves of the beech-trees are struck down one after one by the bullets. It is beautiful in the Midsummer, when it comes in light, soft showers, or, more in earnest, accompanied with thunder-music, straight and heavy; when as the poet says—

‘Rolling as in sleep,
Low thunders bring the mellow rain.’

It is beautiful when it rains far away in the distance, the bright sun shining on the mound on which you stand, and only a few guerilla drops heralding the approach of the shower towards you. It is beautiful among leafless trees, in early Spring or late Autumn, under the meeting boughs of an avenue or in a copse, when every long bough and black branch is glittering, strung with trembling diamonds; when, the force of the wind and rain being kept from you by the trees and underwood, the gentle sadness and quiet melancholy of the scene can be gathered into your heart. It is beautiful in a town, when you stand at the window, and watch the emptying streets; the gutters pour by in a yellow, twisted flood; the street becomes a river, and, as the sudden gust drives them before it,

‘Skirmishing drops
Rush with bright bayonets across the road.’

The window is lined with rows of brilliants, that gradually grow bigger and bigger and waver and fall, ever supplied

by a constant succession of new comers, as the Scotch at Flodden,

‘Each stepping where his comrade stood
The instant that he fell.’

And, since I have mostly spoken of the beauty of rain in the country, I will quote a description* of its beauty in London:—

‘A slight, quick, fervid shower—tears more of happiness brimming over than anger breaking its bounds—had just fallen, and pricked the dry grey pavement into a dark lace pattern of spots, out of which you could select the newest by their being sharper in outline and darker than the rest. The aristocracy of five minutes ago, and the parvenues of the last moment, alike, as the soft warm rain fell now quicker and more petulantly passionate, melting one into the other, losing shape, place, and purpose, as the stone washed luminous brown, and transparent as slabs of Cairngorm agate.’

Londoners caught in a shower will surely thank me for this extract, and recall the description while they admire the process which it describes.

But if some people, notwithstanding my special pleading, still agree with Coleridge’s address to the rain,—

‘Oh, rain, that I lie listening to,
You’re but a doleful sound at best,’

and echo his decision,—

‘And, by the bye, ’tis understood,
You’re not so pleasant as you’re good’—

for these I have yet a word.

* By the late Walter Thornbury.

If we cannot *enjoy*, let us *accept* rain at any rate without grumbling; ay, even though it last day after day; ay, though it spoil our pleasure plans, or our crops—remembering at Whose ordering it comes. People who grumble at the weather always remind me of the Israelites grumbling at Moses and Aaron, the mere instruments used by the Supreme. ‘*What are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord.*’ From whence comes the shower that stops our pleasure-party; the drenching rain that falls, just when the hay or the corn was fit to carry? If such events move our ill-temper, or make us irritable and angry (and many are apt to become so), with whom is it that we are vexed? who has aggrieved us so that we speak as injured persons? Let us have a care. What is that ‘it’ that we speak of as being ‘tiresome,’ ‘annoying’? The clouds, the winds, the rain—*what are these, that we murmur against them?* Are not such murmurings really against the Sender, if we trace them home? Such a result is commonly born of thoughtlessness more than of purpose. But that will not excuse it.

‘Evil is wrought by want of thought,
As well as want of heart.’

But evil it still is, and must remain. Therefore grumbling at the weather appears to me to be something more than foolish and ungrateful. A little thought on the matter seems to mark it as impious and profane. A heathen philosopher would have despised the *silliness* of losing the balance of your temper, when there is no one that you dare blame for the cause. A Christian ought surely to soar beyond this, and, in things little or large, to accustom himself to recognise a

Father's ordering, and cheerfully to accept it, as sure to be the best and wisest.

I said a heathen might despise the folly of those who lose their temper because of rain. A beautiful anecdote occurs to me, with which I met in a very pleasant book, 'Domestic Life in Palestine,' by Mary Eliza Rogers. This lady and her party were traversing, under the conduct of their guide, the fertile plains west of the Carmel range. 'Rain began to fall in torrents; Mohammed, our groom, threw a large Arab cloak



over me, saying, "May Allah preserve you, O lady! while He is blessing the fields!" Thus pleasantly reminded, I could no longer feel sorry to see the pouring rain, but rode on rejoicing, for the sake of the sweet Spring flowers and the broad fields of wheat and barley.'

Can you fancy a more admirable instance of the 'art of putting things'? Can you not imagine yourself almost enjoying the wetting, even though no whit alive to the beauty of rain, *as* rain? So much depends on the manner in which a

thing is put before you; so much depends on the lead which is given to your way of looking at it. Had a grumbling Christian been beside the lady instead of the at least pious-languaged Moslem, to mutter, and repine, and reiterate, 'How very unfortunate' (whatever this word may mean) 'we are!' would not a gloom and dulness brood over the memory of that ride, in her mind? Whereas the beautiful thought of the Arab, as it made the idea of the rain pleasant and lovely at the time, so it dwelt, no doubt, with a rainbow brightness on all after-memories of that cloud.

But enough has been said as to the beauty of rain. It seems, after all, that much depends on our way of looking at the ragged clouds and streaming sky. If we regard rather the inconveniences that will sometimes attend my client, we shall probably not even think of looking for the beauty that I have endeavoured to describe. But if our way is to look rather for what is pleasant than for what is disagreeable, in the common events of life; if nature in all her moods is dear to us, and if we watch, with a lover's eye, each sweet change in her face; especially if we regard God's words as the language of God's thoughts, and if we consider nothing as the offspring of chance, but all things as consequent on His ordering, who sees the sparrows fall, and by whom the very hairs of the head are all numbered—if this be our manner of regarding those dispensations which are above our control, I dare affirm that in nothing that the great Maker expresses, shall we miss finding, not only *use*, but *beauty*. And if I have suggested to some minds any thoughts that may hereafter lead them to share my love for the gracious rain, I rejoice that

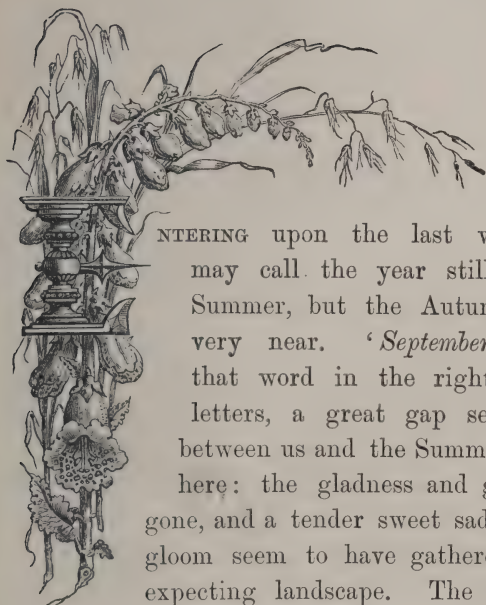
I have been to them the exponent of a beauty that they have missed hitherto; and I shall have earned their gratitude when the soft showers come that water the earth. And if these meditations be read, unhappily for them, not during a dearth, but during a glut of rain, my pleasant labour will not have been profitless, if, though failing to make many admirers of the falling showers, I yet quiet some fretfulness, and correct some thoughtless repining. Some rain, as well as some days, must be dark and dreary. But after all, it rather receives its tinge of pleasantness or gloom from the colour of our own mind at the time, than does itself influence our thoughts. Let there be within us the clear shining of a contented mind, and the darkest clouds will never want for a rainbow. Yea, such a mind, predisposed to enjoy and admire all that the Creator, our father, sends, will need no mediation of an interpreter to bid it discern and gather in for itself the exceeding beauty of rain.



AUTUMN DAYS.

THE Summer has past. How is it with our musing heart as we tread upon the shrunk and darkening leaves, which no more rejoice in their high places, but lie low for ever? They have had myriad moments of twinkling lustre, when they played with the light as the breeze played with them; but they will be bright no more for ever. The meditative man, who has 'risen with Christ,' may tread upon the fallen leaf with quiet triumph. He is 'more than conqueror.' He follows Christ, Who has ascended far above all heavens; follows at slower pace, but knowing that he shall meet with no final interposing bar. To him sepulchral Autumn is, therefore, happy Autumn, for the stone has been rolled away from the tombs of all true Hopes and Happiness. He thinks not of the weight of the stone, but of the strength of the angel; not of the darkness that was, but of the faces of immortal love that have dispersed it. And the closing of another season that tells the finishing of one term of his course, reminds him that the course is one that never can be finished.

T. T. LYNCH.



ENTERING upon the last week of August, we may call the year still Summer,—yes, still Summer, but the Autumn days are drawing very near. ‘*September*’—directly we pen that word in the right-hand corner of our letters, a great gap seems to have opened between us and the Summer. Autumn days are here: the gladness and glee of the year have gone, and a tender sweet sadness and mellow lucid gloom seem to have gathered over the still calm expecting landscape. The corn is all cut and carried, the pale stubble fields, edged with the deep green hedges, lie a little blankly on the hillside or in the valley; the brighter Summer-shoots of the elms and the apple trees have all sobered down, weeks ago, into uniform darkness; the little grey hair-bells tremble in clusters on the dried sunny hedge-banks; the gossamers twinkle on the grass, late into the morning, with a thick dew that has not yet quite made up its mind to be frost. The partridges whirr up from under your feet as you throw your leg over

that stile; the rooks wheel home much earlier to bed. The fungus tribe begins to invade the woods and fields, and after a shower you come suddenly, as you cross the meadow, upon a cluster of buff-white mushrooms, with the delicious rose grey under their eaves, and gathering them for the wife at home, you wander here and there seeking to catch the white gleam



among the grass, and are pleased, when successful, as a child with his first Spring daisies. Quiet, tenderly-sad Autumn days, after the harvest is gathered in and the plums are picked!

‘Autumn! Forth from glowing orchards stepped he gaily in a gown
Of warm russet, fringed with gold, and with a visage sunny brown;
And he laughed for very joy, and he danced from too much pleasure;
And he sang old songs of harvest, and he quaffed a mighty measure,

But above this wild delight an overmastering graveness rose,
And the fields and trees seemed thoughtful in their absolute repose;
And I saw the woods consuming in a many-coloured death—
Streaks of yellow flame, down-deepening through the green that
lingereth;

Sanguine flashes, like a sunset, and austere-shadowing brown.
And I heard within the silence the nuts sharply rattling down;
And I saw the long dark hedges all alight with scarlet fire,
Where the berries, pulpy ripe, had spread their bird-feasts on the
briar.'

We have here, save for some little flaws, a perfect painting
of the intensely still, calm, expecting attitude of nature, the
absolute repose of the year, which rests by its work done, and
asks, in a quiet peace, in a deep trust, of the All-wise and the
All-loving, 'What next?'

'Calm is the morn without a sound,
Calm as to suit a calmer grief,
And only through the faded leaf,
The chestnut pattering to the ground.'

Autumn days! I think they would be very sad indeed if we
could see only decay in them, and if God had not put a little
safe bud and germ of hope into every bulb under the ground,
and upon every branch on the tree—a promise of future life
amid universal death: just as He put that green promise-bud
into the life of Adam and Eve, when such a dreadful death
had gathered about the present and the future for them—
declaring, to their seemingly victorious foe, of the woman's
Seed, that

'It shall bruise thy head.'

A tiny precious germ of a bud, and oh, how many hundred

Summers and Winters passed before it developed into the glorious perfect flower !

And so now, to the heart that is waiting for God, there is yet a sadness, but only a cheery, gentle, tender sadness, about Autumn days. And it seems to me wonderful that He should have given us one of His own minstrels to sing to us from the twigs as they grow bare and lonely-looking, and to express to us just the feeling that Autumn calls up within the heart, and that we yearn to have set to music for us. The little Robin waits his time ; he does not cease, indeed, to trill his note in Spring, although we do not much notice him then, amid our blackbirds and thrushes and black-caps and nightingales ; for he is very humble-hearted, and content to be set aside when we can do without him. But Autumn days come, and the nightingale has fled, and the blackcap is far away, and the lark and the thrush and the blackbird are silent ;—then the robin draws near. Close to our houses he comes, with his cheery warm breast, and kind bright eye, and his message from God. And then he interprets the autumn to us, in those broken, tenderly-glad trills of song, that, simple though they be, can sometimes disturb the heart with beauty that it cannot fathom, but that agitates and shakes it even to the sudden brimming of the eyes with tears. ‘Yes, it *is* sad,’ he says, ‘to see the flowers dying, and the leaves falling, and the harvest over. It *is* sad—not a little sad—still, cheer up, cheer up ; have a good heart. God has told me, and my little warm heart knows, that it is not *all* sad. I know it is not. I can’t tell why, but it cannot be all sad ; for God sent me to sing in the

Autumn days. He taught me my song, and I know that there is a great deal in it about peace and joy. And it must be right; for though my nest is choked up, and my little ones are flown, and my mate has left me, I cannot help singing it. Cheer up. It is sad, but not all sad. Peace and joy—joy and peace.’

‘The morning mist is cleared away,
Yet still the face of heaven is grey,
Nor yet th’ autumnal breeze has stirred the grove,
Faded, yet full, a paler green
Skirts soberly the tranquil scene,
The red-breast warbles round this leafy cove.

‘Sweet messenger of “calm decay,”
Saluting sorrow as you may,
As one still bent to find or make the best,
In thee and in this quiet mead,
The lesson of sweet peace I read,
Rather in all to be resigned than blest.

‘Oh cheerful, tender strain! the heart
That duly bears with you its part,
Singing so thankful to the dreary blast,
Though gone and spent its joyous prime,
And on the world’s Autumnal time,
’Mid withered hues and sere, its lot be cast,

‘That is the heart for watchmen true,
Waiting to see what God will do.

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Let us walk out into the garden. I love an Autumn garden, and I think that at any season of the year a garden is a book in which we may read abundantly about God. On the Sunday evenings, therefore, I like to sit there, under a chestnut’s shade, in the Summer, but, in the Autumn, seeking the mellow

sunshine, with some peaceful heavenly book, sometimes to read, and sometimes to close upon its marker, and keep just as company while I meditate; and God's works seem an apt comment on God's Word, which I have heard or read that day.

But now we will go into the garden in the early morning before breakfast—

‘To bathe our brain from drowsy night
In the sharp air and golden light.
The dew, like frost, is on the pane,
The year begins, though fair, to wane:
There is a fragrance in its breath,
Which is not of the flowers, but death.’

And we step out of the window that opens into the garden, and pass under the tulip-tree standing so tall and still, with pale green and now yellow-touched leaves, that harmonise well with the pale sky against which you see them. The beech in the shrubbery has begun to ‘gather brown’; the full dark elms that shut it in remind you vividly of the poet's description of

‘Autumn laying here and there
A fiery finger on the leaves.’

Against the thick box-trees underneath you love to see

‘The sunflower, shining fair,
Ray round with flames her disc of seed,’

and some tall hollyhocks, still keeping up a brave cheer of rose-coloured and white and primrose and black blossoms upon their highest spike. The grass is glistening with heavy dew, sapphire, rose-diamond, pure brilliant, and yellow-diamond;—

move a little, and the same drop changes from one to the other of these. Walking across the lawn towards that rose-bed, you leave distinct green foot prints upon the hoary grass. Perhaps the feeling that at last almost weighs upon you, and depresses you, is the intense, *waiting* stillness of everything. That apple-tree, bending down to the lawn with rosy apples,—it seems so perfectly still and resting, that it quite makes you start to hear one of its red apples drop upon the path. The hurry and bustle and eager growth of the year has all gone by: these perpetual roses, that used to send out crowding bud after bud—for some weeks a pause, a waiting, has come over them. This one purely white blossom, you have watched it developing, unfolding so slowly, that it scarcely seemed to change, taking a week for what would have asked no more than half a summer day, until at last it had opened fully, and hung down its head towards the brown damp mould. And here it seemed to stop. It seems not to have changed now for a week or two—why should it hurry to fade?—there are no more to come after it shall go. Now half of it has detached itself, and lies in a little unbroken snowy heap on the ground. How quietly it must have fallen there! And the other half still stays on the tree, and leans down, and with a strange calm watches over the fallen white heaped petals,

‘Innumerably frost impearled.’

Something of depression comes over you, I say, and there happens to be no cheery robin just now to put in a gleam of song, nor any sedate rook sailing with still wings overhead across the pale sky, to give you even the poorer encourage-

ment of his mere stoic *caw*. Why are you depressed? What is this strange sadness that seems to you to lurk under the exquisite calm and beautiful stillness of the Autumn morning?

Do you hardly know? I will tell you. That almost oppressive quiet is the quiet of Death coming on; that calm waiting and expectancy is the herald of its approach, the beauty is the hectic flush of the consumptive cheek. Death is sad for Life to contemplate; and we are so much akin to all this decay, that this quiet tells us of it almost more than the heavy bell that now and then stirs the air of the summer morning. The coming death of the summer leaves and the summer flowers preaches to us a solemn sermon of our own death drawing near. Watch that leaf circling down from this silent tree, and listen to the melancholy whisper that stirs the silence of your heart:

‘We all do fade as a leaf.’

Yes, death, the sense of advancing death, is at the root of your sadness and depression. Death in its beauty, in a tender loveliness—death, the Angel, not the Skeleton, yet still DEATH. And,

‘Whatever crazy sorrow saith,
No life that breathes with human breath
Has ever truly longed for death.

‘’Tis LIFE, whereof our nerves are scant,
Oh life, not death for which we pant,
More life, and fuller, that I want.’

And a great warrior, of long ago, one who had less cause than most to fear death, yet said:

‘We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened : not for that we would be *unclothed*, but *clothed upon*, that *mortality* might be swallowed up of *life*.’

And, doubtless, this sadness must in some measure remain ; the flowers must die, and the leaves must fall, and the robin’s attempts to cheer us bring the tears very near our eyes. ‘*Sin entered into the world, and death by sin*’ : and the child of such



a parent cannot bring joy as his attendant. Still, let us go on with our garden walk, and see whether, even in the face of nature, there be nothing else but only this peaceful waiting sadness.

Take these branches of the Lilac bushes, that we remember bending under their scented masses in the warm early Summer days. Bare and damp, bare of flowers, and only with sickly yellowing leaves ; yes, but what else can we see in them ?

There is not one (examine them well) which has not already a full green bud of promise, developed even before the leaves, the old leaves, have fallen away. Again, look on the ground in the shrubberies. What are these little green points that begin just to break the mould? Ah, they are indeed the earnest of the dawn of the myriad white constellations of snowdrops, and the frail flower will sleep warm and safe in the bulb, under the patchwork counterpane of gold beechleaves, and bronze-purple pearleaves, and silver-white poplar, and come out among the first witnesses to tell you that nature is not dead, but sleepeth. Look farther, on to the flower borders, at the base of the tall gaunt stalks of the once stately Queen of flowers. Lo! there already

‘Green above the ground appear
The lilies of another year.’

Not all sad, then; no, not all sad! Memory droops indeed with dewy eyes, but the baby, Hope, is laughing on her lap. There is a resurrection for the flowers and the trees. True, this of itself could not assure us that there is one for man. But God has told us in the Book of His Word, the meaning of what we read in the Book of His Works. And we know now what the robin meant, in his small song without words, and we know what the promise of Spring means, hidden in each Autumn twig. And indeed, the garden and the field, and every hedgerow, and every grass, gather now into a great chorus that takes up an Apostle’s words,

‘This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’

But it is now nearly half past eight o'clock, and the family will be assembling for prayer. Let us pass round this walk, with hearts cheerful, or only tinged with a shade of quiet rather than of gloom—

‘And then return, by walls of peach,
And pear-trees bending to our reach,
And rose-beds with the roses gone,
To bright-laid breakfast.’



Autumn days. Our meditative train of thought may interpret to us the strange oppressive sadness that comes over us, as we watch them stealing on; also, why it is that this is such a tender, sweet sadness, and not a dark, deadly gloom—the shade of a solemn grove, not the blackness of a vault.

Death is indeed a valley of deep shadow still. But the rays of the Sun of Righteousness have penetrated even there—and the hideous darkness is by them softened to a tender twilight hush. So, facing death, which seems defeat, we can yet steadily say,

‘Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’

And now the Autumn days are very calm and restful to think upon, and there is a deep peace in the Autumn of life, for which we gradually grow content to exchange the flush and glee of Spring, and the glory and glow of Summer. Our snowdrops and our primroses are all over, our lilac and laburnum, our roses and lilies, all died long ago; even the fruit is plucked, except for the gleam of a stray red apple that burns upon the nearly leafless bough; and the corn is all carried, and we are wandering over life’s once waving fields, collecting just the last gleanings for the Master. Our larks are silent in the fallows, our thrushes and blackbirds voiceless in the groves; the rich flood of the nightingale’s thrilling song has long been lost to our hearts. The withered leaves sail down about us, the mists sleep on the hills, the dew lies thick in the valleys. But we are very happy and peaceful; aye, even yet there is a stray flower or two, and the Autumn crocus droops on the garden beds; and the berries are bright in the hedges; above blend the feathery tufts of the ‘traveller’s joy.’ And our heart is content with the robin’s song of trust and quiet, that has taken the place of—if richer and fuller—yet less spiritual and more distracting strains. There is an

intense waiting calm; but, oh, such thoughts of Life!—life everlasting, life indeed—push their way through the yet unfallen leaves of this frail existence;—and that small cheery melody is, we well know, the prelude to the full symphonies that shall burst from Angel choirs.

How beautiful a time, thus thought of, is life's Autumn time! I love to read of such a calm season in the life of a good man—a calm only broken by flashes of exultation, that come, as the aurora borealis into the tender hush of the sky. There is a sadness, no doubt—there *must* be a sadness—in the coming shade of death which deepens on the path. But the bud of life in the very heart of death; of this we are more and more conscious, the closer we draw near to the stripped branches of life's hopes and delights. And, as the fabled scent from the Spice Islands, even over the darkening seas are wafted to us sweet odours from the Promised Land.

Autumn days—when the flowers are over, and the harvest well-nigh gathered in, and the flush and the eagerness very far behind, and the strength and the vigour things also of the past:—I think they may be sweet days to which to look forward amid life's hurry and bustle, its excitement of laughter and tears. A very peaceful land, a land of Beulah, where repose seems to reign, and all seems 'only waiting.' No more wild dreams, it is true, of what life is going to be, but then no sad wakings, and, lo, it was a dream! No more quick blood coursing in the veins, no more excess of animal life making stillness impossible and silence torture; no more young devotion and quick enthusiasm, warming the heart even to prepared tinder, ready to flare at the first spark of friend-

ship or of love. No more glow of poetry cast about every face and every daisy, and every sky, and every scene of every act of the coming years. No more expectation of becoming a great poet, a mighty warrior, an evangeliser of the world. And then no vigour to act, as when life went on ; no leading the front of the battle, striking strong strokes for the right ; no rejoicing in the strength that, later on, has now come, and that is still, still in its prime.

All that, and more, has passed away from life's Autumn days. It was, perhaps, rather sad to feel these things departing ; to notice growth first come to a standstill—and then, here and there the streak of Autumn, and the first yellow leaves stealing down. To find the years so short, instead of so long ; to lose the ready and earnest appreciations of youth ; the wonder and the thrill at the first snowdrop, the first cowslip ; the first nest low in the bushes with five blue eggs ; the first excursion round the park wall for violets, or into the wood for nuts. To lose the glow of early love, the despair of early disappointment, the vigour of early intention and action ; and to mellow down into a half-light, undisturbed by any of those violent lights and shadows. It was, I say, perhaps rather sad to feel these things departing.

But now they have gone, and the Autumn days have come, and the heart has settled down to this state of things, and is content that it should be so. It is better, far better, the old man sees, to be in the Autumn of life, though he yet thinks tenderly, lovingly, of those young days in the impetuous, overblossomed Spring. The 'visionary gleam' has left his sky. But a truer, if a quieter, lustre has arisen in it and abides.

‘*There hath passed a glory from the earth.*’ But the glory has been transferred to Heaven. It was sad, at first, when the glamour, and the magic, and the glow, passed away from this world, which to youth’s heart seemed erst so exceedingly, inexpressibly glorious and fair. But it is better so. A mirage gave, indeed, a certain sweet mysterious light to life’s horizon, and the traveller could not but feel dashed at first to find little but bare sand where the unreal brightness had been. But he journeyed on, learning, somewhat sadly, in manhood, God’s loving lesson, that we are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, that we have *no continuing city here*, not love, nor fame, nor wealth, nor power; none of these could, even had we attained it, prove a City of Rest: we must still journey on before we can sit down satisfied. And God’s true servant, in his Autumn days, has learned not to miss nor to mourn over youth’s mirage. Nay, his future has ‘no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it.—For the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.’

He looks at the sky, which is certainly darkening, because life’s one-day sun is going down. But, the lower it sinks, the less he laments it, for he finds that it did indeed hide from him the vast tracts of Infinity, and close him in, by its light, in a small low-ceiled room. Oh quiet days of peace and tranquil hush and mild serenity; the rocking waves of the passions asleep about the tossed heart, and the glittering thoughts of heaven reflected instead from the calm soul; and its speechless infinite depths gradually mirroring themselves in the being! Happy days, when life’s feverish, exciting novel is closed, and we are just reading quietly for an hour in the Book of peace,

before the time comes for us to go, tired, to bed ! Happy days ; when God Himself is striking off one by one the fetters and manacles of earth, and will soon send His Angel to open for us the last iron gate of our prison !



How thankful we should be, as we pass into the Autumn, or those kind words which assure us that life's beginning, not life's end, is then really near ; that it is but the bud of immortal

youth that is pushing off those withered leaves of mortality ; for those, I mean, who have given the whole year of their life to God ; or, at least (so great is His mercy in Christ Jesus), the earnest gleaning of its late months. For else, how sad to watch the sun setting, the only sun we know of, setting, and to hope for no long day beyond. Think of what a wise heathen said of old age. Cicero wrote a treatise, a wonderfully beautiful treatise, in praise of it. But all the while he was only playing with his own sadness, in his old age ; pleading the cause of a client, in whose cause he did not believe. For, after all, he writes his real thought to his friend Atticus. ‘ *Old Age,*’ he says, ‘ *has embittered me—my life is spent.*’ Sad, yet a just estimate from his point of view. Sad—all spent : and no good hope of a ‘ treasure in the heavens *that faileth not.*’ How even one of the little ones in our village schools could have comforted sad Cicero !

Now see what Christianity can do, and has done. Think of waiting Simeon :

‘ Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,
According to Thy word :
For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.’

Hear aged Paul, the great champion Apostle, leaning now on his sword, and exhorting the younger warriors who are leading on the war, that he soon must leave. What peace, nay, what exultation, flashes through the quiet of his waiting.

And a picture arises before us of another aged, very aged man, ending the Bible and his life with these solemn rapturous words of glowing expectation—

‘ He which testifies these things saith, Surely I come quickly.—
Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!’

There is another aspect of Autumn days, dreary and sad, to thought,—the Autumn days of the worldling. But to the obedient faithful child of God, their sadness, we have seen, is gentle, peaceful sadness, a tender hush more than counter-balanced by the promise of we know not yet, *what* exceeding ecstasy and glow of life, while we speak of it as *the life everlasting*. Aye,

‘The grass withereth, the flower fadeth,’

and there must be a hush over Autumn days, because death must be melancholy, even when it is beautiful. But how sweet and glorious, amid the fall and decay of the loveliness and beauty around us, to be able to rest our heart quietly upon a land beyond earth’s horizon; and to look forward brightly and happily across these changes ‘to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and *that fadeth not away*.’



MUSINGS ON THE SEA-SHORE.

So floated once a Vessel
On such a glassy Sea;
And so a crowd once gathered
Of old in Galilee.

For He whose voice had drawn them,
Taught them from out the Ship,
And all that throng hung breathless
Upon his eye and lip.

And still, the Words He uttered
Can make hearts throb and burn:
We still are waiting for Him,
When, when will He return?

When the World's lawless evil
Has reached its highest tide,
Then will the veil star-spangled
Draw its blue folds aside.

Then the Doors Everlasting
Lift up their heads again,
That He may be revealed,
Whose right it is to reign.

'O! come!' our hearts are calling;
'O! come!' all Nature cries—
The green Earth's Expectation,
The Sea's incessant Sighs.

C. M. N. [*Name of Jesus*].



'Mourn on, mourn on, O solitary sea,
 I love to hear thy moan,
 The world's mixed cries attuned to melody
 In thy undying tone.
 Lo! on the yielding sand I lie alone,
 And the white cliffs around me draw their screen,
 And part me from the world. Let me disown
 For one short hour its pleasure and its spleen,
 And wrapt in dreamy thought, some peaceful moments
 glean.'



HE tide is coming in ; the waves are big enough to
 be called waves, yet they break upon the shelving
 shore from a perfectly calm sea. And the long
 ranks rise and fall at my feet, curving and
 breaking in endless succession ; line after line sent forth by
 the stern mandate of General Ocean, to die each in his turn
 upon the impregnable rampart of the land. Ever since the
 third day of Creation has this assault been protracted, now
 by craft, now with the thunder of artillery and the violence
 of the storm ; although it be really so hopeless that the

balance of things remains about as it was at the beginning. If the armies of the Sea have made a breach here, fresh earthworks have been thrown up in another place by its stubborn antagonists, and the interminable strife remains equal still.

But the solemn Sea forbids longer trifling; and its oppressive vastness, and melancholy murmur, and mysterious whisper of ever born and ever dying waves, own, surely, some grave meaning.

‘The earnest sea,
Which strives to gain an utterance on the shore,
But ne’er can shape unto the listening hills
The lore it gathered in its awful age—’

it seems to demand an interpreter. Let it be accordant with my mood to disentangle some of its utterances. Let me employ this hour of thought upon the lonely shore, in guessing at the meaning of the voice of the long lines which ever bow to the ground before me with Eastern salaam, and then retire, having delivered their message.

‘The sea approaches, with its weary heart
Mourning unquietly;
An earnest grief, too tranquil to depart,
Speaks in that troubled sigh;
Yet the glad waves sweep onward merrily,
For hope from them conceals the warning tone,
Gaily they rush toward the shore—to die.
All their bright spray upon the bare sand thrown,
How soon they learn their part in that old ceaseless moan!’

Yes, this well-worn lesson shall be the first that the waves shall teach us—the vanity and disappointment of human aspirations, of its early hopes and dreams. See the waves, how

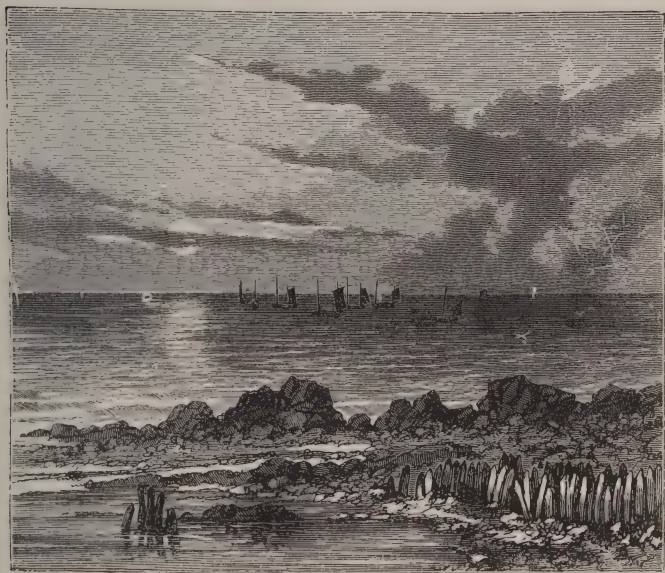
glad and gleeful and bright and energetic they come on, twinkling with a myriad laugh, line behind line, eager ridge chasing eager ridge; all setting toward the cold sullen shore of the unsympathetic earth. Oh the clear pure curve, and the unsullied transparency; and the glancing crest of feathers and diamonds, and the rainbow tints as at last the longed-for shore is reached, and the eager plunge made! Oh the dis-illusion, the broken enchantment, 'the check, the change, the fall,' when the white glittering spray lies now, lost and sullied and broken, upon the defiling earth; and the wave—amazed, daunted, shattered, quickly changing from over-hope to over-despair—flees back with a wild cry to the great Sea. Another and another and another, the warning is not taken; it is true that contact with earth scattered this bright hope, this strong purpose, this brave design, this gleaming ambition; it is true that the yellow sands have been busy, ever since the Fall, inviting and then defeating the advance of eager waves; receiving, marring and sucking in the trembling snowy spray, the rainbow-tinged bubble dreams that the heart lavished upon them; and changing joyous onsets into moaning retreats. Yet who will expect the young heart to believe in the destiny of all its mere earth-dreams, *so long as, within it, the tide is coming up?* You almost smile, though with no scorn, to hear that momentary despairing sigh. For *you* stand now on a point from which you can see a seemingly exhaustless and endless array of ever-new schemes, and hopes, and fancies, and purposes, and ambitions and dreams, line chasing line, towards that magic disenchanting shore. Those behind cry 'Forward!' Vain for those before to cry 'Back!' Yea, them-

selves, though shattered, soon pick up their broken forces, and swell the energy and join in the advance of the crested lines that chase one another to the shore.

This, then, seems to be one lesson of the waters coming in. Human aspirations and dreams, advancing gaily in youth, awhile seeming to make some progress; but learning at high tide that they have but been conquering unprofitable tracts of barren sand. Then yielding ground inch by inch, losing their grasp of the world and relinquishing the very lust thereof; and, spoiled, and stained, and marred, and with a very heart-moan, sinking to low ebb as life turns. Was not this Solomon's story? Wave after wave dancing to the shore, curve after curve breaking eagerly upon it, scheme after scheme, toil after toil, pleasure after pleasure, hope after hope, ambition after ambition, dream after dream; the eye is bewildered and dizzyed with the ceaseless motion, the steady endless advance of the gay and crested waters—'Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy: for my heart rejoiced in all my labour.' It was gladdening, exhilarating, exciting to see the flashing battalions of earthward plans, and earthward dreams, pressing each close upon each, whither?—to the inexorable, impassive line of rocks or sand—what matter that here one shattered with a crash against a cruel blunt crag, and fled with a scream, and that another left its light and beauty trembling and sinking into the sand, while itself slunk back with a hollow sigh; what matter these single and insignificant experiences of the vanity of things mundane, while there was yet a whole rising tide of wildly eager waters, coming in fast, fast,

exhaustless, infinite, flashing and gleaming and dancing in the sun? On, gaily on, and what if some perish? Are there not myriads to follow? Why heed the waste, amid youth's profusion?

But a pause comes over all the glad onset; a stagnant time, a period of neither advance nor retreat: the tide is at the full.



You mark no change for awhile either way: then at last, below the beach, a space of wet sand begins to border the line of dying spray. Broadening and broadening; but it was quite enough that it had once begun to appear. The tide has turned. Here is 'the check, the change, the fall.' An eager strife, a wild race,

an impetuous advance, a profuse and uncalculating spending all youth's energies, and purposes, and powers, and aspirations; an excited resistless march. And with what result, when you come to estimate your gain? An unprofitable and transitory conquest of a narrow track of barren sand.

Oh draw off, draw off your broken forces, defeated in that they were victorious; disappointed by the very fact of attainment; steal back with that heart-sigh of 'Vanity, vanity, vanity; all is vanity,'—back into the deep sea again! Leaving, it is true, the energy, and the colour, and the light, and the gladness, and the purity; the crested spray, the diamond drops, the rainbow gleam; all lying wrecked, and sucked in by the hungry shore. Leaving the spoils of youth, yet glad anyhow to get away; for what can equal the bitterness of that moment when the tide, long at a standstill, begins at last to turn?

'Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.'

No,—and the bitter thought is, that not the missing, but the attaining, the prize, has disappointed; not failure, but success, has embittered: and that it might have been known from the very first that thus it must be—that the coveted possession was but profitless rock or bare sand. There was a warning voice to this effect, but, oh! who heard or heeded it in that glorious advance of the long battalions of brattling gleaming waters? And, to add bitterness to the bitter cup, this was all an old story; we were not, as we dreamed, invading new worlds; no,

those ancient sands have borne the furrows of myriads upon myriads of just such excited, eager, leaping tides. The anguish has not even the pathos of novelty; it is actually commonplace. That which seemed so new to us, at what more than millionth hand we received it!



‘The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

‘Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us.’

And so hark to the moan of the waves as they draw off, when the tide has turned, and the disenchantment has come; sigh

after sigh, moan upon moan, in the weary and desolate retreat, 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.' Yes; and farther on, a more bitter wail, as it passes back over some spot where some of the gayest morning hopes were spilt: '*I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*' Lower and lower yet, with yet duller and heavier moan: '*What hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.*' And now an almost fierce and angry cry: '*Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me; for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*'

And what then? Is this the end of all? Is there no hope for the wailing tide; no redemption for the scattered spray?

I have seen what has seemed to me a sweet and touching answer to this question. Over the desolate sands a quiet Mist has been drawn, while the sea moaned far away down at low tide. And I seemed thus taught how even earth's wrecks may be repaired, and earth's ruin turned into gain. Better to give to God the fresh sparkle and the first eager and joyous onset of life. But if not, and if the waves must set towards some earth shore, until they are broken, sullied, and wrecked there, see what the rising mist teaches. Let them, as it were, remember themselves, and at last come homeward, leaving the stain and the defilement behind. So merciful is God, that even our ruins and disappointments are all messages of His patient love to us. If we will not turn at first to Him, He will let us break our hearts upon the shore of earth, content if but

at last our hopes and aspirations will rise in a pure repentant mist from their overthrow and ruin, and wait beside the gate of heaven, touched now with the clear moonlight of peace, and expecting the rich sunburst of glory hereafter. The very overthrows and dissatisfactions of earth may thus rise, spiritualised and purified, to God at last.

This, no doubt, is the intention of the disappointments and inadequacies which come from contact with this earth, upon



which the heart at the time of the coming in of the tide, spends so much of its powers, and against which it bursts, and breaks, and dies down into wild cries and weary sighings. This is the intention—an intention, alas! too often unfulfilled. For if God is saying, ‘Turn, my children, from that careless dwelling upon earth’s pursuits, excitements, and enterprises, to heavenly aspirations, letting your heart and mind, like rising mist from broken waves, ascend, instead of dwelling in tears

on the bare sands that were never worth the winning—ascend thither, whither He who loved you is gone before, and continually dwell with Him, in the place called Fair Havens, where the waves of this troublesome world have ceased their restless eager quest, and are lulled into a peace beyond all understanding’—if God thus invites us, even by that sigh of our broken retiring waves, there is another voice, commonly heard, and too often heeded—a voice counselling hardness, repining, rebellion: a moan of sullenness, of despair, of defiance—a voice that whispers, ‘Curse God and die,’ rather than, ‘Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.’ The voice, oh let us be assured, of folly, not of wisdom; of our Enemy, and not of a friend.

Some stanzas bearing the initials of the writer’s Father and the date of many years ago,—may be appropriate here. They set forth the story of many a life: the vain pursuit, at first, of earth-delights: the wreck of these, and the despair; the coming home, at last, to the only secure Stay, and Support, and Rest.

‘How oft on the dark rushing ocean of life,
 As my bark, dashed from billow to billow, arose,
 I have paused, while my heart sickened sad at the strife,
 And murmured to Heaven a prayer for repose!

Oh, ’twas not *always* thus,—for so radiant and bright
 Was the picture that fancy upheld to my view,—
 I dreamed that my day would ne’er darken to night,
 That no shadow would gloom o’er my sky’s azure blue,

“But hark!” said the wise, whom the years had passed o’er;
 “The best earthly hope, as a flower, must soon fade;
 And alas, before long, thou wilt mourn for the hour
 When the world and its glowworms deceived and betrayed.”

—Yet onward I rushed, for a lovely beam play'd
Too fair in its glory, I thought, to be vain,—
And above me,—around me, its halo display'd;
—Oh God! 'twas a phantom that madden'd my brain!

Alas, (sighed my soul in its wailing,) for rest!
Tho' even the grave, and its gloom, were my bed;
With the stone at my feet, and the turf on my breast,
And the wind moaning through the long grass o'er my head.

—Eternal and changeless! in mercy the same!
Oh, then, in that dark hour, Thou deignedst to save;
To rescue a brand from the fierce burning flame,
A soul from the depths of a fathomless grave!

“O come unto Me,” said the heavenly voice,
“And cast all thy cares on this bosom of Mine—
The bright star of morning shall guide thee,—rejoice,—
For the night is far spent, and its shadows decline.

Poor wanderer! O come! for My power can control
The rave of the tempest, the dark troubled sea,—
A rest never-ending remains to thy soul,
Then come, weary wanderer, come unto Me!”

—O, yes, I will come;—there is something within,
That tells me a refuge like Thine there is none;
Ah! aid by Thy Spirit the soul, that from sin
And from care, seeks repose in Thy mercy alone!”

W. H. V.

The waves are still tumbling upon the shore; with scarce perceptible progress they have advanced really a broad space since I took my station here. Ever gathering their forces in long parallels, ever bending and falling, and seething back in wide sheets of white foam, seemingly ever repulsed, but really ever advancing, they bring to my mind an idea of great

beauty and truth that I have somewhere met with, though where I cannot recall. It was a comparison of the earnest humble Christian's progress in holiness to this coming in of the tide. And the healthy Christian life will always be advancing; there must ever be in it a progression in holiness. Stagnant water is deteriorating water; it does not continue to be the same as when first it ceased to flow. And this oft-repeated truth will come saddest home to the more earnest, who are therefore the more humble. There ought to be, there *must* be a continual advance, if the water be a living sea, and not a stagnant pool.

But dare we hope that there *is* any such progress, such steady continuous advance in our own Christian life? Alas! we look sadly back at it and see long lines of earnest endeavours, at least of passionate yearnings, after better things, after perfection, after the beauty of holiness, after Christ-like consistency: they came in, and come in still, bright perhaps, and intent, and resolved; and, lo! how they trip and fall as they reach the shore of trial, and slide back, losing all the ground again! Ever advancing, only to recede; ever rising, but to fall; ever trying, yet still baffled; only able to weep out their hearts over their own weakness, and to sigh continually with a depression that men call a morbid pain. New yearnings at every special time of solemn self-examination; new resolves, driven on by the breath of prayers; new endeavours; and, after all, old failures! How the waves come in, earnest, but impotent, each running up the little way on the shore that its predecessor had attained, and giving ground again, to be succeeded by another as weak.

But to cheer and encourage us sometimes, amid all this depressing history of failures, which may well serve to keep us humble, there is another analogy with the rising tide besides that of its endless endeavours and endless failings. There is, as with the waters, *an advance upon the whole*, though they seem to keep at much the same point, and to be doing little but ceaselessly recede and fail. You might mark, were you a watching angel, how this point is reached, and that passed; and how, though (and better for them here and now) the sighing waters perceive it not, the waves of each day's expiring and almost despairing, but still earnest and prayerful efforts, have increased a little upon the shore to-day, and deepened and secured yesterday's work. And *quiet earnestness* seems recommended by this thought: for have we not seen as a contrast with this,—some impetuous waves come dashing in, as though to take the shore at one rush? And it is these most commonly which, meeting steady and sustained resistance, and feeling the strength dying out from them which excitement had lent; it is these impatient spirits that then lose heart most deeply, and sink back the farther, and sometimes quite fall away with a shrill and bitter cry, and lose themselves in the Deep, too dismayed to return,—rather, too little really in earnest to face the necessity of the daily, hourly strife—the inch by inch advance, the little by little, the day of small things.

If we are humbly in earnest, and if we are stedfastly, quietly striving, with unyielding watch and instant prayer, and faithful use of every means of grace, then we may hope, amid experiences which seem sometimes scarce anything but

a sad history of failures, that thus there may be yet *advance upon the whole*.

But now I remember that there is, in appearance, and to the unpractised or uncareful beholder, little difference between the tide that is advancing and that which is going down. Still the endless hurry of flocking waves, still the appearance of life and purpose, still the advance and retreat upon the shore—and what is the difference? If there are here many, many broken defeated, and baffled endeavours, why so there were when the tide was rising.—Ay, but the difference is an important one, even that there we found advance,—here we find retrogression—*upon the whole*. And have we not an analogy also here? Alas! how great is the danger that is subtle and unseen; and in a spiritual falling back, it is the very slightness and imperceptibility of the loss of ground that makes the case so perilous. They have given over their watchfulness, their close observation of marks; the breath of prayer has fallen to a stillness; the waves seem to gleam and ripple and crisp over as of old, and how shall the unearnest heart and the unwatchful eye ever suspect that *the tide is going down*?—a sinking, it is, so gradual, so stealthy, with such slight difference from day to day.

Many noteworthy causes there are of this lamentable failure and decline, many subtle enemies, that is to say, to diligent watchfulness and continual prayer. ‘Much trading, or much toiling for advancement, or much popularity, or much intercourse in the usages and engagements of society, or the giving up of much time to the refinements of a soft life—these, and

many like snares, steal away the quick powers of the heart, and leave us estranged from God.' 'How awfully do people deceive themselves in this matter! We hear them saying, "It does me no harm to go into the world. I come away, and can go into my room and pray as usual." Oh, surest sign of a heart half laid asleep! You are not aware of the change, *because it has passed upon you.* Once, in days of livelier faith, you would have wept over the indevoutness of your present prayers, and joined them to the confession of your other backslidings; but now your heart is not more earnest than your prayers, and there is no index to mark the decline. Even they that lament the loss of their former earnestness do not half know the real measure of their loss. The growth of a duller feeling has the power of masking itself. Little by little it creeps on, marked by no great changes.' And yet you would start, had you an Angel's point of view, to see how wide a strip of former advance is relinquished now. The treacherous sands suck in the wet line, and it ever seems to you, little altered, just a narrow band such as always edges the advancing and retiring waters, whether at ebb or flow. And how great does this danger then appear to be!—how deadly the craft of an Enemy too subtle ever to startle us!—how needful to watch for that retrogression which can hardly be perceived! Little by little we advance, and commonly little by little we decline. Even a great fall, it has been pointed out—one which seemed a sudden catastrophe, unheralded by any warnings—what a slow, gradual process of 'retirement neglected and hurried prayer' had been long preparing secretly for this. But just now a saint, men think—and on a sudden a notorious

sinner! Ah, they know not for how long, secretly, imperceptibly, and undetected, but surely and fatally *the tide had been going down.*

Enough of these desultory musings. Let us pause awhile in reverent silence, contemplating the mighty Sea as a whole, assuredly of things upon this earth our greatest emblem—an emblem grand, oppressive in its vastness—of Eternity and Infinity.



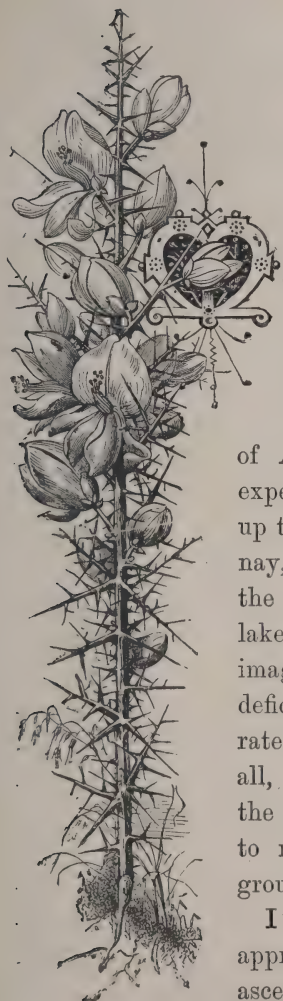
MUSINGS ON THE MOUNTAINS.

WHEN first thy eyes unveil, give thy soul leave
To do the like; our bodies but forerun
The spirit's duty: true hearts spread and heave
Unto their God as flowers do to the sun;
Give Him thy first thoughts, then, so shalt thou keep
Him company all day, and in Him sleep.

Yet never sleep the sun up: prayer should
Dawn with the day: there are set awful hours
'Twixt heaven and us; the manna was not good
After sun-rising; far day sullies flowers:
Rise to prevent the sun; sleep doth sins glut,
And heaven's gate opens when the world's is shut.

Serve God before the world; let Him not go
Until thou hast a blessing; then resign
The whole unto Him, and remember who
Prevailed by wrestling ere the sun did shine:
Pour oil upon the stones, weep for thy sin,
Then journey on, and have an eye to heaven.

G. HERBERT.



OUNTAINS! I scarcely feel myself competent to fulfil the promise of this title, for I was never upon one in my life! Never had I the advantage of contemplating the mighty eminences of America; I have not even had the experience of standing beneath and toiling up to the summit of the white-haired Alps: nay, even the grand hills of Scotland, or the classic watchers beside the English lakes, have never been visited by me. Still imagination will often supplement the deficiencies of experience, and it is, at any rate, a good thing, I am convinced, for us all, so far as we can, to leave sometimes the plain of our daily routine of life, and to muse upon at least relatively higher ground.

I will begin by recalling my nearest approach to any experience of mountain ascent.

I was staying in Herefordshire with my elder brother, in his parish among the hills and woods. Always, when a friend is with us, it seems a favourable opportunity, and, as it were, a bounden duty, both for his sake and our own, to rove somewhat, and to explore some of the more distant country. Accordingly we fell to planning expeditions, and after divers suggestions, hesitations, and rejections, fixed upon a small village beside a lovely stream renowned for its trout and grayling, and near a hill famous in those parts, and named Croft Ambrey. We were to sleep two nights at a small inn near the stream, and from that stream we were to extract our breakfast. There is always a great charm about these expeditions—a novelty, an independence, a pleasant breaking through the trammels of life's daily routine, in their enterprising pic-nic character. And so my brother, his wife and I, started on the appointed day, in high glee. We were, I remember, however, employed, all the morning, in the vain endeavour to catch the white pony; and were at one time almost in despair of our getting off at all. The little rogue had been put up to some sly tricks by a horse with whom he had been observed to have been, for some days previously, conferring over the fence, and I remember the almost comic provocation with which he let us sidle up to him, with blandishments and barley, until just within range for the halter, and then, at the very moment of attainment, was off, and anon standing demure and meek at the other end of the field. Nor did we fare better if we altered our tactics, and, as wolves over the northern snows, tried to hem in our prey in a deadly half-circle. He ever contrived to give us the slip, and it was not

until we were wearied out, and on the point of giving up our expedition for that day, that he surrendered at discretion.

We started, nevertheless, wound up again as to our spirits for the excursion, and thoroughly enjoying a twenty-miles drive through lovely scenery. It was so late, however, when we arrived near Croft Ambrey, that we had but time that afternoon for a walk towards it, and up a lesser hill, and so back to our quiet little inn, close to the Lugg. How oddly one enjoys the meals on these occasions! That broiled ham and eggs, and home-brewed beer, in the little sanded room; what costliest refection could for a moment compare with them? The charm of novelty, I suppose, in scene and room and everything, is the secret of the appreciation. Of course, it is easy to understand the zest that attends a dish of trout and grayling of your own catching.

But to return to Croft Ambrey. Next day we were prevented by other engagements from fulfilling that with our hill. And, since we were to start quite early on the morrow, the chance of my ascending it seemed over when I retired to my homely, but clean, little bedroom at night. However, I had not quite given the thing up. It was in my mind, could I but contrive to wake at five in the morning, to sally forth, while great part of the world was asleep, and explore the peaks, passes, and glaciers of that noble hill. I am not good at waking, unless called. But—and this seems an illustration of how the mind controls the body—it is certain that if you go to sleep with a strong desire to wake, or sense of duty concerning the waking, at a certain hour, you not unfre-

quently, after a careful fumbling under the pillow, find your watch demonstrating pretty nearly the time that your mind had appointed. At any rate, I know that, on that occasion, I awoke next morning, with a sudden instinct consulted my privy counsellor, and was by it informed that five o'clock was yet a few minutes distant. And so I arose, and drew the blind, and looked out upon the still world, in the sharp cool morning air. The light seemed clear and cold, and there was an incessant twitter and loud chirping dialogue of many awakened birds. A thin mist was withdrawing from the fields, and yet lay upon the course of the river. I hastened my dressing, and quietly slid downstairs. How well most of us know the weird strangeness of the house at the early morning hour, when all in it are yet asleep, but day is peeping in through closed shutters, and above locked doors! The darkling light; the breathing hush; the dog curled on the mat, rising uneasily, and surveying matters suspiciously, but, reassured, settling himself down again with a preliminary shake, when

‘His sagacious eye an inmate owns;’

the sullen disturbing sound at the street door, of bolts, and locks, and bars, that would have seemed noiseless enough by day. And then the clear sharp feeling of the air, when you step out of the house; the silent unpeopled worship of nature at its matins' hour; the shadows, long as those of evening, and more grey and pearly, along the white empty street. And, enhancing the stillness, perhaps one lonely traveller met,

seeming as though the world's only inhabitant; and, as you walk farther on into the day, presently

‘The carter, and his arch-necked, sturdy team,
Following their shadows on the early road.’

Thus, then, I sallied forth, and to my mind the details of that morning walk seem now even more distinct than when I trod it. The pause of consideration as to the turning to be taken; the selection, as it happened, of just the right gate; the belt of pines half-way up the hill, that from below seemed so near the highest point, but attained, showed a further height still to be surmounted—reminding of all striving upwards here after any excellence, especially after holiness;—the pleasure when at last the summit was attained; the little incidents connected with that attainment; the frail harebell plucked, and kept even now pressed in my pocket-book; the curious war that I found and left going on between a hawk and a rook; each striving to get above the other, each making and each avoiding the hostile swoop; all these slight matters are the details which make that day's whole to be still a distinct sharp picture to my mind.

And very full of matter for musing appears to me now that morning expedition. I forget how many counties of England and Wales lay outspread before me; some six or seven, I think. Certainly a mist brooded over them, and I did not see them clearly; but yet there, in fact they were, and I know not but that the half-appearance may have more impressed (imagination being called in to complete the scene) than a

clear panorama would have done. The world's every-day sights and sounds lay far beneath me ; the narrow scope of the ordinary view was widened ; for fields I surveyed counties in my landscape, and for hedges, lines of distant hills. All things were wider and larger, and I breathed a more ex-



pansive, freer air ; and I seemed, I think, a little raised above life's pettinesses, by the quiet and breadth of view of that early morning ascent.

Ah, friends,—and brothers in both the meannesses and the great expectations of this strange, finite, infinite existence,—

how we need, how we need, these periodical ascents into Higher ground! How large life is; and yet, how little! How we fret and fume about fields and hedges—merest trifles, I mean,—when counties and hills—nay, continents and seas—nay, worlds or systems, might lie under the ken of our perception and contemplation, which, indeed, has no bounds, forward, through eternal time, and infinite space! How, in the littleness of things, are we apt to swamp the largeness which they might present to our thought! How life's pettinesses overmaster the mighty and boundless prospect that God has set before us, looming at present indeed through a veil of mist, far below our feet! Oh, how grand, how stupendous, how magnificent, might this our life, rightly thought of, become! Money, love, fame, power; these are, while we stand on the mountain, as the tinkle of a sheep-bell far below us in the valley; it is the pigmy form that we see, it is the muffled cry that we hear, of those things which seemed to us large and of full growth, when, in the bustle and busy intercourse of life, we met them down far below. I think of Martha, with the ordering of a meal, for her Divine Guest, the the great matter in her eyes; Mary, indeed abiding quiet at the Saviour's feet, but, thus seated, and listening to His words, placed, in good truth, as though upon a mountain, from whose wide range of view all merely of this world seemed petty, worthless, mean. Should we not seek to attain a mountain view of this brief life! Should we not endeavour towards an angel's view! Then money, power, talents, influence, all would be things noble, as offerings to Christ; things contemptible in any other aspect. And we crave, some of us, to take always

that standing-point; to survey life—so far as such as we are can do so—from God's point of sight; to look at time as, after all, only a minute wheel, which is part of the stupendous machinery of Eternity; as something very small, that fits into something very large! The littleness of life; its scandals, its jealousies, its irritations, its safe voyages or its wrecks, its gains or losses of a fast-flying hour; its loves and hopes, its hates and despairs, its ecstasies and anguishes; these are the fields and hedges that are perceived no longer, when we have ascended above this brief and transient state of things, and look down upon counties, continents, worlds.

Yes, we mourn over life's pettinesses. We grieve, in our better mountain hours, to find ourselves always so very easily disturbed and moved, either to enjoyment or vexation, by the merest and most absolute trifles! Bitter is it to us, next time we attain the wider view, to perceive how easily, and naturally, and contemptibly, we descended, after the last ascent, down among the thronging, chafing, soul-lowering interests and phantasies of this lower world, this span-long life again! Strange is it, spark of the Infinite, that finite things can so absorb thee! Strange, heir of Eternity, that time's dancing motes can affect thee so much! Wonderful, member of Christ, child of God and inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven, that it can much concern thee in what station of life, in what external condition, it may please Him that thou shouldst serve Him, here, and now, in this minute of space and time!

In life's morning we may all, I think, be said to stand on the mountain, and, although it be a morning view, made

illusive by mist and early sunshine, to obtain the widest, least petty, view. More unbounded, more noble, more expansive—all these the scope of youth's sight must, in a sense, be conceded to be. There is not the suspicion, the narrow thought, the selfishness, the intent consideration of the present interest; there is a broader, more generous way of contemplating life, than we shall find later on in its course. Doubtless there is the greater proneness to be deceived. The eye is not yet trained to calculate distances; arduous undertakings are misjudged; easy attainments are regarded with admiration and awe; there are many mistakes, much proof of want of experience. But as life goes on, and as men, by descending, gain this knowledge and correctness of estimation, often the wider view narrows, the freer air is left behind, and the eye, that erst roamed over and took in that nobler scope, becomes shut in, by surrounding trees and hedges, into the range of but one small field. Could we, as a few have done, not barter youth's noble aspirations and superb ideas for manhood's experience and practical mind, but add the gains of manhood to the portion of youth, how much greater a thing we might make this life of ours to be! For certainly in youth we do stand upon an eminence, and look round, so to speak, upon counties and hills, and gradually, as manhood gains upon us, are apt to descend towards, as it were, mere gardens, fields, and fences.

And so the evil to be guarded against—or to be deplored—will be the declension of the mind and heart from this wider, more open and generous view, a loss inward, not outward. Mixing, as we soon must, among life's pettinesses, youth's grand dreams past, how many of us forget the mountain upon which

we once stood, nor care to ascend it still from time to time, but are content to sink into hardness, coldness of heart, narrow-mindedness, selfishness, a cynical, unsympathetic temper, a habit of low suspicion, a littleness of caution, a close hand, an absorbed heart. So that our wisdom will be, to try, from time to time, to draw apart from the highways and byways and crowded walks of life's daily cares and concerns, and to ascend a point which overlooks them and brings them more into their just proportion with that wider view, which diminishes, if it does not absorb them.

In reading some of the highest poetry we find this ascent gained. It carries you up into the ideal, from life's mean realities and commonplaces; there is an atmosphere of honour and love and generosity; as in the days before

‘Earth was all too grey for Chivalry.’

Men think and act grandly, in these Idylls and Epics, and money-getting is not the mainspring of all. And this is one profit of high and wholesome poetry, that it does water and keep alive those nobler, greater ideas and yearnings that the dust of the world's traffic might otherwise choke. For the heart's true poetic sense (I am not speaking, of course, of mere sentimentality) is no doubt one of the links nearest to God in the chain which connects us with Him.

How much of the sublimest poetry we find, in truth, in the Bible. And here I would point out a special way by which we may indeed at pleasure breathe a mountain air—always obtain a mountain view. This will be ensured for us in the sacredly-kept times of morning devotional reading. In a trouble, whether a small worry or a crushing anguish, there is



refreshment for us, when the time has come round for the reading and meditation on the things of Eternity and of God. How, as we proceed on our upward winding path, the fret or the agony insensibly takes its fit place in the wider landscape, and thus diminishes, by an imperceptible process, from the exaggerated size it presented to us, when we stood beside it on the plain. Other greater objects open upon our view, and attract our attention; the far scenery of God's mighty workings widens out before us, and the vast Ocean of Eternity stretching round and embracing the little island of Time. And we seem to feel a cool air fanning our hot tear-tired eyes, and we breathe more freely, and our heart, despite of itself, loses somewhat of its weary load. The world is left below; even the clouds sleep under our feet; and heaven is nearer, not only for that hour, but during the rest of the day.

And how naturally may this thought of mountain-quiet and distance from earth's noises lead us to the consideration of that most exquisite and precious communion with God which we know by the name of Prayer. In associating the season of prayer with the idea of mountain seclusion, two pictures rise naturally before the mind, representing to us a mountain as actually the scene and not only the type, of earnest and retired prayer.

We see first the top of Carmel, bare and burnt under the sun of Palestine, and overlooking the intensely blue sea. Upon it the solitary prophet Elijah bends to the ground, prostrate on the earth, his face between his knees. A watching form stands on a point looking, with steadfast gaze, towards the sea. For long the burning glare which, as a brazen dome, has for years

spanned the earth, reveals no break in the pitiless brightness. At last, far away over the water, in the sultry horizon, a little dark speck, like a man's hand, arises, and, on rapid wing, the delicious cool clouds gather and spread their awning between the burnt earth and the vehement sun. Then comes the glorious sudden rush of the restoring rain, steady, incessant, abundant, settling in pools on the caked ground, streaming down the sides of the orange hills, sending eddying torrents to brim the parched cracked river-beds. Thus impetuous and profuse came the answer to the Prophet's lonely mountain prayer.

And another, dearer, picture we never weary of contemplating. Another account telling us of One who, after the day's toil of healing, of teaching, of feeding the multitudes, sends the thronging crowd away, dismisses even His disciples in a ship across the lake, and then, when

‘The feast is o’er, the guests are gone,
And over all that upland lone,
The breeze of eve sweeps wildly as of old,’

retires up into a mountain apart to pray, and continues all night in prayer to God. What a lesson! The crush and press dismissed; even the closest and most intimate companions avoided, and a quiet time secured for we know not what prayer to the co-equal Father.

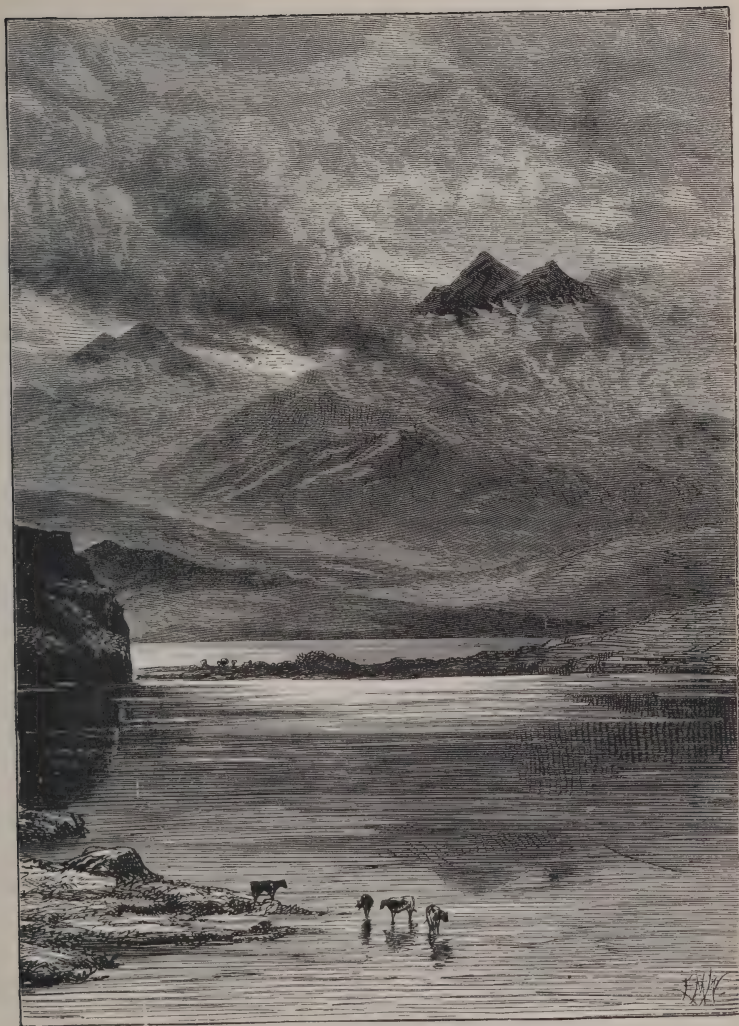
Would that we, His disciples, more entirely followed His example! How, if our prayers had more leisure secured for them, were more strictly protected from intrusion and disturbance, were more lonely—how they would aid us to breathe the air of the mountain, to keep ever before us its wider view,

even when we had descended to mix again with life's thronging necessities in the plain. Though we have retired to our room, and the door is closed upon us (for I am speaking here of private prayer, not of public worship,)—even thus, it does not follow of course that we have ascended to the mountain, and, in solitude, are speaking, through the stars, to God. The larger crowd may have been satisfied and dismissed, but we have perhaps taken with us, into our retirement, some few that were more intimate and close to our heart; and we have not been careful enough to be *alone*. The preparation of dismissing the multitude, and even the disciples, then the ascent of the mountain by the winding path of meditation, and then the looking forth upon the unrestricted view, the sky nearest indeed touching us, and earth spread out far below, and the soul left to calm, leisure, unharassed, communion with God; all these are necessary; to all these we are guided by the example of that mild yet awful Being who is God manifest in the flesh. Let us arm ourselves with the same mind.

But our thoughts, returning to that morning walk which introduced this essay, may remind us that there is one suggestive point in it which deserves a little attention. This is *the time of day* at which the ascent was made. Early prayer, while the world's cares are asleep, and the road lies hushed and still, not thronged with jostling passengers, nor stunned with noisy vehicles—this is that, which of all our private devotions, most aids in consecrating life to God. Descending from that early hour of high communion, to take our part in the awakening toil and interest of earth, it is then easier to give their proper proportion to the events and employments of the day. Be it

a joy or a sorrow, be it a loss or a gain, it takes its just place in the grand scheme of things, and does not monopolise the heart, nor obscure the vision ; far less will the mere straws in the path, or the butterflies that dance by, catch and retain the absorbed regard of the heirs of immortality. The tiresome flies that buzz, the trifling irritations, the mean jealousies, the little rankling grudges, the petty quarrels, also the transitory enjoyments and short-lived profits, of each day's life, will not greatly, nor for long, move the heart that retains its memory of that far-stretching Morning view. And its influence will render it less difficult to rescue this everyday life from its proneness to become ignoble, and to free ourselves from the narrowing, stunting, dwarfing process which it often is, but which it was never intended to be. Yes, but for these mountain-pauses, but for these retirements from the over-familiarity and intrusiveness of trifles, how shall we avoid the danger of habitually, and, soon, entirely, bounding our view and mode of thought by the hedges, as it were, which shut in our eyes and hearts, down in the valley of our ordinary employments ?

And how greatly have the saints of God valued this early hour of prayer ! They have likened it to the Dew which the later hours have irretrievably dried up ; the Manna which has vanished when the sun has gained strength. And there is no doubt that the quality of the spiritual life greatly depends upon the jealous guarding of this priceless hour, which so easily and quickly escapes us. At that hour Jordan stands in a heap, and leaves us an undisturbed passage heavenward. But the rapid stream of cares, businesses, anxieties,



To complete the ideal of a mountain, it seems necessary to see a lake at its foot.

worries, returns to its strength as the morning appeareth, and if we would then cross at all, it must be during a distracting and wearisome buffeting with those crowding waters.

Let me say here how valuable appear to me to be the retreats that are being established in many parts of England. Who does not know how the routine of little cares, and small wearing anxieties, and petty, yet necessary employments, are apt to eat out the spirituality from even the pastor's life, especially if he be placed in a sphere which presents labour, after which he is ever toiling, but which he can never overtake? These opportunities of temporary withdrawal seem to me, at least, formed upon the very model of our Lord's custom, and at once to commend themselves to any unprejudiced mind, or even any prejudiced mind that has preserved the power of calm and fair thought. I will let Cowper continue and conclude this loop-line of musing :

‘Not that I mean to approve, or would enforce
A superstitious and monastic course;
Truth is not local, God alike pervades
And fills the world of traffic and the shades,
And may be feared amid the busiest scenes,
Or scorned where business never intervenes.
But 'tis not easy, with a mind like ours,
Conscious of weakness in its noblest powers,
And in a world, where, other ills apart,
The roving eye misleads the careless heart,
To limit thought, by nature prone to stray
Wherever freakish fancy points the way;
To bid the pleadings of self-love be still,
Resign our own, and seek our Teacher's will;
To spread the page of Scripture, and compare
Our conduct with the laws engraven there;

To measure all that passes in the breast,
Faithfully, fairly, by that sacred test;
To dive into the secret deeps within,
To spare no passion and no favourite sin,
And search the themes, important above all,
Ourselves, and our recovery from our fall,
—But leisure, silence, and a mind released
From anxious thoughts how wealth may be increased;
How to secure, in some propitious hour,
The point of interest, or the post of power;
A soul serene, and equally retired
From objects too much dreaded or desired,
Safe from the clamours of perverse dispute—
At least are friendly to the great pursuit.'

To complete the ideal of a mountain, at least in a picture, it seems necessary to see a lake lying at its foot. I have such a picture in my mind's eye, besides that of Scott's.

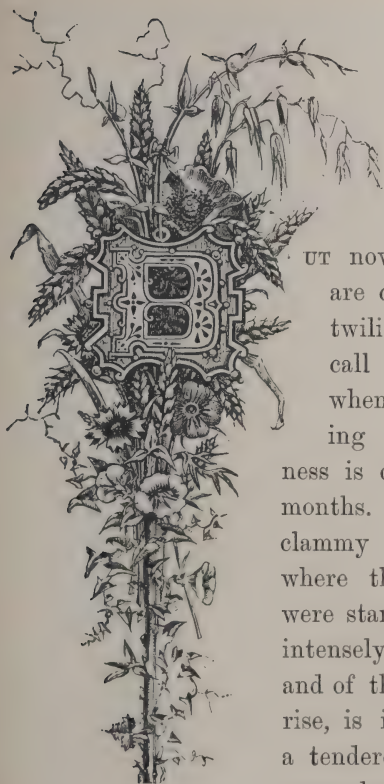
' — On yonder liquid lawn,
In hues of bright reflection drawn,
Distinct the shaggy mountains lie,
Distinct the rocks, distinct the sky.'

And a beautiful lesson seems by their association suggested to the mind. For thus ought the mirror of our daily life, which lies at their foot, clearly and constantly to reflect the calm and the beauty and the elevation of our mountain-hours. Beware of subtle influences, sudden winds and treacherous currents, which, ruffling and wrinkling the lake, shall mar and blur the image of those high moments, and of the heaven yet far above the mountains.

MUSINGS IN THE TWILIGHT.

—TILL now the doubtful dusk revealed
The knolls once more where, couched at ease,
The white kine glimmered, and the trees
Laid their dark arms about the field:
And sucked from out the distant gloom
A breeze began to tremble o'er
The large leaves of the sycamore,
And fluctuate all the still perfume,
And gathering freshlier overhead,
Rock'd the full-foliaged elms, and swung
The heavy-folded rose, and flung
The lilies to and fro, and said,
'The dawn, the dawn,' and died away;
And East and West, without a breath,
Mix their dim lights, like life and death,
To broaden into boundless day.

IN MEMORIAM.



UT now the quiet days of September are come. September, which is the twilight of the year—rather, I would call it the first hint of twilight when the flush and glow are sobering down, and a cast of thoughtfulness is deepening day by day upon the months. Autumn ‘has o’erbrimmed the clammy cells’ of the bees; the fields where the long rows of many sheaves were standing, gradually grow bare; the intensely dark summer green of the elms and of the hedgerows out of which they rise, is interrupted here and there by a tenderer tinge; the spruce firs in the copses begin to appear more dark, distinct, and particular; the larches begin to show faint hearts, and to look more delicate beside their sombre brothers. There is rather the augury, the prescience, than the perceived presence of a change. It has pleased me, as day by day I watched the quiet of the September landscape, sometimes to let fancy suggest that the trees have plotted together and banded them-

selves by an agreement not to give in, this time, but to defy the utmost power of stripping, desolating Winter. And it is curious, with this idea, to watch them. Throughout September, they at least keep up appearances well, and from one to another the watchword is whispered—

‘Keep a good heart, O trees, and hold
The Winter stern at bay!’



and for a time they moult no feather, drop no leaf; or, if one circles down here and there, it is huddled by in a corner, and they flatter themselves that none has noticed. But you watch

with pitying love, knowing what the end must be. And you perceive how great the effort, the strain, becomes, to keep up



appearances. Here and there, at last, despite of their utmost endeavour, the hidden fire bursts out ; and finally, with a wild

Autumnal wail, some weaker tree, in despair, gives up the unnatural and too excessive strain, and let slip, on a sudden, a great profusion of yellow, sickly foliage. There is a reproachful murmur among the stouter trees; but, in good truth, they are not sorry for the excuse, while, muttering that



‘ Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.’

all is rendered useless now, like to avowed bankrupts, they give up the effort to sustain appearances, and as it were, with a sigh of relief and rest, resign themselves to the fate they vainly strove against and could not long avert. So the Elm flames out into bars and patches, very yellow amid the dark ;

and the Chestnut is all tinged and burnt with brown, and the Mulberry has slipped off all her leaves in a single night; and the Ash and the Sycamore blacken; and the white Poplar leaves change to pale gold; and the Pear to bronze; and the wild Cherry to scarlet; and the Maple to orange; and the bramble at their feet to bright crimson.

Not so is it yet, in the Twilight of the year. September is the month of tranquillity, of peaceful hush. If there be a hint of decay, it is but what has been called 'calm decay;' it is but evening with the landscape, the Evening of the year. You might forget, as you looked at the resting stationary aspect of things, that the further change, the Night of Winter, was indeed drawing near. There seems no prophecy of those wild tossing October arms, with the stream of harassed leaves hurrying away in the wind; no presage of the dull November days, when, from the scanty foliage of the trees, great drops plash down upon the decaying leaves beneath, and the whole wood looms out of the fog. Far less, in the full-bosomed, sober, rather air- than mist-mellowed woodlands, do you detect any foretelling of the time when all will stand, a bare thicket of gaunt boughs and naked twigs, duly reflected in the ice, or made darker and more dreary by the great white fields of snow.

Of all this there is no hint given yet, nor need we yet suffer ourselves to awake to the knowledge that we have indeed bid the kindly Summer farewell till next year. The evenings are still warm, warm with that cool warmth which is so delicious: it will be some time yet before we can see our breath as we talk: we can stay out well until seven or later, and hear through the open window the clatter of arranging teacups,

and watch the lamp, still combated by the twilight, warm the room with a dim orange glow.

Therefore I shall sit here for awhile on this garden seat, and muse in and upon the twilight. The scene and place are favourable for quiet thought. The lawn is smooth and shaven; at my feet lie beds of profuse geranium, verbena, calceolaria, petunia, in their rich Autumn prime, before any hint of frost has visited them. The air is quite heavy with the scent of the massed heliotrope. The colours, if sobered, are not yet lost in the fading light; the scarlets and purples are hushing and blending; the cherry colour, yellow, and white, have grown more distinct, and stand out more apparent upon the grass. Overhead, the sky is deepening to that dusk steel blue which soon discloses the very faint yet eye-catching glimmer of one white star. Across the quiet dome, and between the outstretched, motionless branches, the silent bats flit to and fro; there is a rustle of chafers in the lime. One sweet melancholy monotonous sound gives a background to the silence, an undertone that enhances, not in the least disturbs, the quiet. For the great charm of this garden, which lies on the slope of a hill, is, that near the foot of that hill swells and falls the ever-moving Sea. And looking from my garden seat through the near rose-bushes and above the taller growth that clothes the slope lower down, I see the broad silver shield, rising, as it seems to me on my hill-seat, towards the circle of the horizon. An hour ago, I was admiring the brilliancy and intensity of its colour, green shoaling into blue, and glittering in the sun; now the faint light of the broad moon shares the sway of the decaying sun light; and I see above and through the branches, that come

between, a space of pale bright grey. The jewel colour and sparkle of afternoon have died out from it, but the more neutral tint accords better, I feel, with the sober hour and hushed sounds of twilight. How satisfying, as we reverently study them, is, if we may so speak, the harmony and the balance of colour in all these pictures, the embodied thoughts of God.

And I love these twilight studies, much resembling which are the paintings, so Robert Browning tells us, of Andrea del Sarto, the faultless painter. Pictures in which—

‘A common greyness silvers everything,
All in a twilight.’

This poem of Browning’s is essentially a twilight poem, I always think; silver-grey in tone; the soliloquy of a quiet calmed heart that has settled down, acquiescingly, at last, into a deep still sadness and disappointment. Contemplating his own work, perfect as far as it aimed, the ‘faultless painter’ yet longs for those higher aspirations which can here be but imperfectly expressed, knowing that it is not well unless we hold an ideal far above our fulfilment here; and that, if we have attained all we sought in our pursuit of the beautiful and the good, we have not *intended* nobly enough:—

‘There’s the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
That length of convent wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease
And Autumn grows, Autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self,
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight piece.’

Is not the tone of thought here expressed one natural to us all at certain times, when for us life's vivid lights and deep shadows have all saddened into a uniform half tint? Every sensitive mind has such twilight hours: times when the sun has sunk, and our heart has gone down with it, and a grey depression settles gradually upon the soul. Times when we feel that all that we are and do is little, and low, and mean; when we yearn for a sympathy that earth has not to give; when we turn away disheartened and disgusted from our life and from ourselves, and set the faces of what seemed our most faultless works to the wall, and care not if we never saw them again. Times when we go about to cause our heart to despair of all the labour which we have taken under the sun. Times when the failures of others seem better than our successes; times when, seeming to see, for a moment, our very selves as they are, we lament over the lowness of our aim, the meanness of our intention, the winglessness of our soul. And yet times when our very discontent with all that we are and have accomplished, our very disgust at our grovelling minds, prove our affinity really with higher things than any of these that we have grasped here. Those anguished yearnings to be nobler give testimony that we are something nobler than we hold ourselves to be. The depression of the twilight hour marks our kindred with the golden glory of the sun. Thus may we cheer our hearts, that in their dull seasons are wont to judge our aims by our attainments; and, from the inadequacy of the performance to conclude the lowness of the intention. The workman's dissatisfaction with his own life's work, is the clear proof that his inmost self is

nobler, not only than his achievements, but often even than his endeavours.

I awake from my abstraction, however, and look around. The twilight has deepened, the flowers are losing their colour, the surrounding objects their distinctness. One peculiar property, sometimes a charm, sometimes a dread, of this light neither clear nor dark, begins to be developed. I mean the uncertainty, the indefiniteness, the illusions of Twilight. And how many analogies occur to my thought as I sit here musing on the twilight, and comparing with it the indistinctness of the light and the ænigma of the circumstances, in which we are living here.

And first, in connection with this train of meditation, I think of God's ancient people: and call to mind how many of God's promises to them were misconceived because of the twilight in which they were seen. And we might, thinking but shallowly of the matter, and, doubtless 'darkening counsel without knowledge,' wonder that the light of prophecy was such twilight merely, so dim, and the objects seen in it so undefined and uncertain. For instance, how obscure and almost confusing seems to us the revelation given to the Jews as to the spiritual nature of the Messiah's kingdom. Foreseen through the twilight of prophecy, we may very well fancy that a grand earthly kingdom of power and conquest loomed upon the hope and imagination of the people of Israel. Because of the hardness of their hearts, indeed, and the lowness of their spiritual standard, spiritual revelations had to be clothed for them in, as it were, a body of flesh. The people

that, under the very cloud that rested upon Sinai, could worship the golden calf, would have ill-received, we may be sure, a clear revelation of the manner of the Messiah's kingdom. A kingdom not of this world, with no outward show of pomp and glory; a King despised and rejected of men, and nailed upon the accursed tree; how would those carnal hearts have received such a programme? Nay how *did* this people, even when Messiah had come, receive it? Behold the shouting crowds, one preceding, one following the King of the Jews! Behold the waving palms, the strewn garments! Hear the loud 'Hosannas' ring out as the concourse arrives in sight of the royal city; and the enthusiastic burst of homage, 'Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord!' 'Blessed be the kingdom of our Father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!' What visions we perceive, were seething and working in their minds—visions of restored freedom, and rule, and power, and the sway of Israel restored, as in those old glorious days, from the river even unto the sea. Grand, and splendid, and indistinct, the dream of that promised kingdom towered before them in the twilight; they threw loose reins on their imagination, and let it carry them whither it would.

But when the truth which they had so misconceived and misinterpreted stood revealed to them, and they perceived its entire difference from their excited dreams, mark then the change—the revulsion. The King is crowned; His Kingdom is proclaimed as being not of this world: the crowd are shouting still; but the cry is now, '*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*' Nay, further yet. The discovery of the real proportions and

character of that fabric, which had appeared so majestic and superb through the twilight: this discovery had proved too much even for their faith who had formed the chosen court of the King Messiah. 'We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel;'—but, lo! the Shepherd is smitten, and the sheep are scattered.

Now, as it has been pointed out before this, an illusion of the twilight was, by the impatience and the carnal hearts of the Jews, converted into a delusion. It was true that a mighty King was coming, that He should set up a Kingdom great and glorious, one whose growth should crumble widest kingdoms into the dust. It was true that the enemies of God's people should fall before this Kingdom which should have no end; true that this King was He which should redeem Israel. All this which was prophesied was no delusion: all was true: all came to pass.

But now let us search out the fault of the Jews, who were deluded by revelation, and blinded by the partial light that was given. They were told that these great things would be; they were bidden to prepare to receive them. Forthwith they decided in their own minds *how* and *in what way* God would bring them about: after the pattern and desire of their own vain hearts, they gave form and shape to those indistinct, half-seen masses; they decided that God would give them the exact reality of their own carnal dreams; they prepared their heart therefore to receive its own interpretation, and shut it close against any other. And so, when the fulness of time brought them close to that which their fancy in the twilight had thus disguised, they could not recognise it, they refused

to accept it: they passed on beyond it, still searching after the unreal fabric of their own imagination. And even now, while the twilight seems deepening to darkness about them, they go on and on across the blank desert, seeking the realisation of those gigantic hopes which have already, could they but believe it, been much more than fulfilled.

‘Oh say, in all the bleak expanse
Is there a spot to win your glance,
So bright, so dark as this?
A hopeless faith, a homeless race,
Yet seeking the most holy place,
And owning the true bliss!’

That this was not God’s design, but the result of their own impatience, and of the earthliness of their own hearts, we have abundant proof. ‘In time past,’ in that light, neither clear nor dark, there were those who were content to wait until God Himself should reveal the manner of those great things that He had foreshadowed. Many died thus implicitly waiting; some, with Elizabeth, and Simeon, and holy Anna, departed in peace, their eyes having just seen the dawn of His salvation. By diligent use of the light already vouchsafed to them, they had attained to a more spiritual and humble understanding of prophecy; and so to them was fulfilled that saying, ‘Unto you that have shall more be given.’

But have we not passed out of the twilight even now, ‘in these last days,’ that Christ’s fuller revelation has come? No: for, I take it, still, while we live here, is it ordered that we should walk in the dusk; it is with us *waiting* still for the

grand indistinct objects of prophecy to assume a definite outline as we draw near to them; it is the passing on, generation after generation, in a twilight march, contemplating the attained reality of one dim foreshadowing, and straightway looking up to see before us the gigantic distant form of another, awful in its dimness and uncertainty.

Is not this what the Great Teacher would have us to understand when He declares that the spirit of a little child is the right and necessary spirit for those who would receive the Kingdom of God? In the contemplation of these mighty mysteries we are to be content to be children now, not yet men: it is to be Twilight here; Noon hereafter. How it saddens me, then, sitting in the twilight and waiting for the wonderful panorama of morning to unrol; how it saddens me to hear the loud talk nowadays of our attained manhood—of our possessed noon. Nowadays, forsooth, we are so full grown, have such clear light, it is claimed, that we are to handle doubts familiarly, and to decide at once concerning that which God has but half revealed; and to reject what we cannot understand, and to deny that which we cannot define. Man's reason—methought that, here and now, it was required to work in the sphere of the twilight; but this idea is by some, wise in their own conceit, rejected with scorn, and they would fain persuade us that it is already placed in the full blaze of day. The 'province of reason,' we hear great talk of this;—and yet now let us ask what really is the true province of reason? Is this, can this be, to determine and decide, to understand concerning, and to fathom, the deep and mysterious ways of God, and His counsel, secret to us, and *past finding out*?

One would think this must be so, to see men rejecting this and that revealed truth, because, in the twilight, they cannot understand it, or because it will not piece in with that creation of their own fancy, which they would substitute for our revealed God. Yet to me it seems that we have not the material, the data, for such an exercise of reason; we have not *revelation* enough for this; the light is too dim.

No, as we sit here in the twilight, it seems to me that, in the study of the things of God, the province of reason is not the straining its vision to map out the huge mysteries which are still undefined in the dim distance; and to declare that those masses are shapeless whose shape it cannot trace. Is not its province, rather, to consider and to decide concerning those things which *are* placed within its scope? And first, and above all, to satisfy itself as to our Guide, as to the reliability of the proofs of His being really what He claims to be; to search whether these things be so, and then implicitly to follow that Guide, as He leads us on, step by step, through uncertainty into certainty, out of the twilight, into the clear day? To define its province thus, is not to fetter reason, to cramp thought. It is merely to confine it to its legitimate sphere. It is to acknowledge ourselves now in the dusk, but expecting the full morning; to own ourselves children now, but children who will one day be men.

Are we not little children here; our very reason doubtless in its twilight; probably as unable—even were they set out before us, and explained to us—to take in God's counsels, as a child, just capable of simple addition, would be unable to master and understand the mixed mathematics of the Senior

Wrangler? Would anyone who considered wisely of these things, even wish that this present state should be our manhood? How low a view of man's magnificent destiny were this? What: this indeed all? To-day's crude conclusions material for to-morrow's corrections; schemes of science changing every year; nothing certain, nothing known? Are we to grow no maturer in knowledge, are we to grow no maturer in capacity, than this? Is such dim twilight really our full day? A dreary prospect for us then; a mournful lot! But away with so mean a view of man's Future: with such a limitation of the possibilities, hereafter, of man's reason!

As little children, only in the elements of learning, are we, must we be, with regard to the stupendous plans and counsels of God, so long as we have no more than our present amount of Revelation. We may advance in mundane knowledge, but before God's ways and counsels, we must be content to sit down in the twilight, still as listeners, still as learners, reverent, teachable, humble; little children still. How, in the nature of things, can it be otherwise? We hear of the boasted advance of knowledge and education; we hear of reason more cultivated, and thought more free to soar. All very well; but does this, can this touch the subject of which we are thinking? In acquiring any further knowledge of God's hidden things, have we, in these later days, advanced at all? Is there in our possession any more material on which to set reason to work, than when the last Apostle closed the last Book of the Scriptures of God? Have we advanced? can we advance? Must we not here still be children, must we not still make the most of twilight, until, having grown to manhood,

the full light bursts upon us in another world, and we see no more by means of a mirror, in an ænigma, but face to face; know no more in part only, but even as we are known?

Oh, brother, doubting brother—if any such should overhear this soliloquy—wavering where thou shouldest stand firm, and ready to let that slip, which thou shouldest keep in thy heart's heart—wilt thou not take this word of the Wisest and Best of all, of a Teacher most mighty in intellect, most vast in knowledge; yea, who spake as never did man: wilt thou not say it to the perturbation of thy soul, until there fall on it a great calm? A little child, a little child; that is the model for us here. Noon, some future day; but now, twilight: men, hereafter; but here, children: called upon here not to explain and to fathom, but to listen and to believe. First, of course, let reason determine whether our Teacher be trustworthy; and, studying, with simplicity of heart, His life and words, can we doubt of this? And this decided, cannot we be content to be taught by Him? Toil on in the half-light, and the full light shall break on thee in thy labour! Do the works, and thou shalt know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.

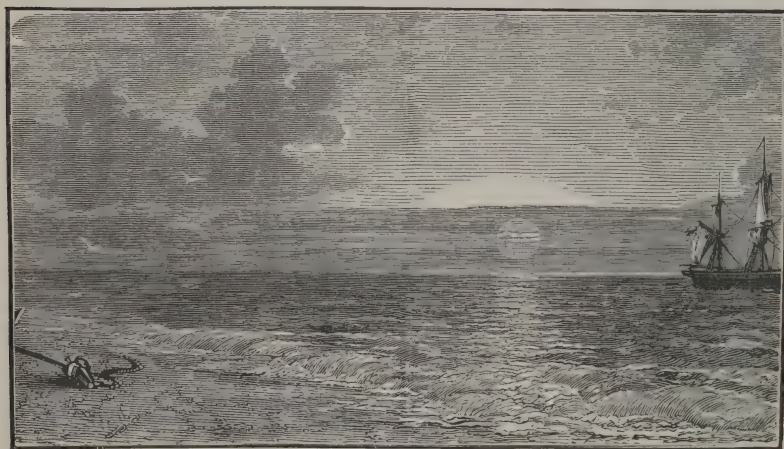
Yea, but you urge, this is none other than a leap in the dark. Before I *feel* the divinity of the doctrine, why should I do the works? What is my warrant, that I should *do*, before I *know*? This, O man, I repeat, *satisfy thyself as to thy Guide*. Examine whether He be, indeed, that which He declares Himself to be. Bring a Nathanael-spirit to the inquiry. And then commit thyself to His guidance. Implicitly, entirely, as a child that loves to put his hand into his Father's, *because* of the uncertain light.

Do, then, the works, on this warrant—the warrant of reasonable trust. Believe me, the doing them will make thy faith rock-firm. Is there not, I would ask the sceptic—is there not something in a simple child-like faith, leading to a holy angelic life, that brings the protest of a great reality against all your doubts and waverings? Watching such a quiet unearthly life, you feel, through all your haunting shadows, and vague questionings, that here, at least, is something *real*. While you have been making religion a series of hopeless puzzles, he has been making it a series of simple, loving deeds. You studied revelation in order to find out its difficulties; he studied it in order to master its precepts, to learn how to live. And, depend upon it, he has thus, by his study, gained a far deeper insight, even into those mysteries which are unfathomable, than you can ever do by yours. Do the works: then thou shalt know much more even of the doctrine.

O, my brother, be content; 'tis only waiting! Receive the kingdom of God as a little child—nourish the child-like, though not the childish, spirit. ‘Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?’ If we enter the lists with Him as equals, He will (I speak as a man;) mock us, and let us be inextricably puzzled, and bring to nothing the understanding of even the prudent and intellectual. Thus did our Lord with the cavilling Pharisees, perplexing them with the question how Messiah could be David’s son, and yet his Lord. But if we will so humble ourselves to sit at His feet as learners, He will teach us much that the humble alone may know. Granted that in this dim light some of His ways puzzle us, and seem inexplicable. Granted that His own words must continually

be brought home to us, in our twilight state, ‘*What I do thou knowest not now.*’ But there is no necessity to understand His counsels, in order to the attaining salvation. And let us take it on trust, as well we may, that what may seem God’s harshness is, really, kinder than man’s kindness; that what may seem God’s foolishness, is wiser than man’s wisdom; that what seems God’s weakness, is stronger than man’s strength.

I have mused in the twilight, near the boundless, restless, ever-tumbling sea, and under the vast canopy of heaven; I have mused in the twilight, until the darkness has fallen, and



the heaven is eloquent with its sign-speech of stars. Sitting in a speck of one of those myriad worlds, that, flying along with inconceivable velocity, yet appear, to us in the dark, intensely still, I seem to catch a glimpse of the immensity

of the plans and designs of God. Star whirls by star, system fits into system, all in an astounding complex order; none clashing, each kept in its due place and its right proportion by the Infinite Mind. And I gather a hint of a reply to many questions that perplex us, many problems that weary us here; questions that are often best answered by the confession that here we cannot answer them; questions worst answered by an impotent attempt resulting in an inadequate explanation; questions that we may perhaps quiet with such thoughts as these:—Who knows into what other schemes and systems this life of our globe and of ourselves may be fitted; who knows, seated in this isolated planet, in this narrow twilight of Time, how the vast day of Eternity before, and the vast day of Eternity behind, may make at once evident things that, here, were, to our mind, deepest, seemingly shapeless, mysteries? The moon revolves round the earth, and the earth round the sun, and this our sun, again with all its planets, round some greater centre; and so on, perhaps, who shall guess how far? For space, as well as time, is infinite, boundless, incomprehensible, sharing these attributes with the eternal God. And thus, too, I divine, must it be with that vastness and complexity of scheme whose immensity we shall not begin to grasp until we gain the standing-point of Eternity; thus too, I seem entitled to prophesy, must it be with the infinite designs of God, and with the interwoven system of His counsels. How can we, how *should* we, understand the different bearings, the linked relations, of His eternal plans? A fly perched on one nut in the enormous machinery of some manufactory, and deciding upon the plan and purpose and working of the whole,

from the twistings of the point on which he stood ; nay, this is not even a far off analogy with the case of man's Reason standing on the attainments of this speck of Time, and complacently deciding concerning the tremendous counsels of Him who inhabiteth Eternity.


Heaven is revealed to us as night deepens. Thus, as the Twilight of the good man's life dusks towards night, stars, unperceived before, stars of certainty, of knowledge, of hope, of trust, steal out one by one into his sky, until the heaven is one glitter above him. Earth dies out, and becomes indistinct ; its colours are toned down, its scenery becomes less absorbing and obtrusive ; it begins to take its proper place in the eternal glittering dust of worlds. And so, amid that speaking silence, the guileless Israelite falls asleep. I suppose that then, in Paradise, a clear morning breaks, which afterwards, in Heaven, becomes the full light of noon.

But the Twilight has gone : night has come down upon the sea : the earnest silence of those infinitely multiplied stars becomes oppressive : a chill also seems to have fallen upon the garden. Therefore I go indoors, close the shutters, and rest my strained thoughts with the sight of the circumscribed, cheery lamp-lit room ; and, asking and obtaining of my wife some half-dozen of my favourite 'Songs without Words,' call back my musings from those exhausting mysteries of our twilight state, and lull them with the gentler and more peaceful mystery of music.

WINTER DAYS.

—Now there was a great calm at that time in the river; wherefore Mr. Standfast, when he was about halfway in, stood awhile and talked to his companions that had waited upon him thither; and he said, This river has been a terror to many: yea, the thoughts of it have also often frightened me. Now, methinks I stand easy; my foot is fixed upon that on which the feet of the priests that bare the ark of the covenant stood, while Israel went over this Jordan. The waters indeed, are to the palate bitter, and to the stomach cold; yet the thoughts of what I am going to, and of the convoy that wait for me on the other side, lie as a glowing coal at my heart. I see myself now at the end of my journey: my toilsome days are ended. I am going to see that Head which was crowned with thorns, and that Face which was spit upon for me. I have formerly lived by hearsay and faith; but now I go where I shall live by sight, and shall be with Him in whose company I delight myself. I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of; and wherever I have seen the print of His sandal in the earth, there have I coveted to set my foot too. His name has been to me sweeter than all perfumes. His voice to me has been most sweet; and His countenance I have more desired than they that have most desired the light of the sun. His words I did use to gather for my food, and for antidotes against my faintings. He has held me, and has kept me from mine iniquities; yea, my steps have been strengthened in His way.

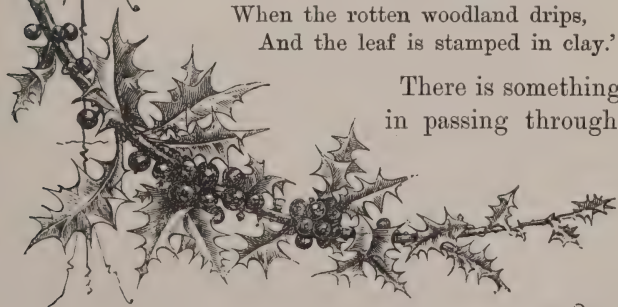
JOHN BUNYAN.



HERE is always, I think, much more of sadness in the anticipation of Winter days, than, when they are once fairly at home with us, we find they at all deserved. The anticipation of Winter bareness, after Autumn profusion, is sad : the transition from one to the other, has its melancholy side. The month that severs the two is a month somewhat tinged with gloom, and it is habited in a weeping robe of fogs and mists. There is a certain chill and mournfulness in wandering about the shrouded expanse of the so-lately rich Autumn fields,—

‘When a blanket wraps the day,
When the rotten woodland drips,
And the leaf is stamped in clay.’

There is something sad
in passing through the



sodden lanes, thickly carpeted with flat damp leaves, and strewn with the bright sienna chestnuts; here the gleaming nut, and there the three-fold shattered husk, brown-green, with cream-white lining.

You may find, it is true, a sort of pleasing melancholy, an attraction of tender romance, in watching the first tints of Autumn stealing over the Summer, from the very first, when

‘The long-smouldering fire within the trees
Begins to blaze through vents,’

until,—tree by tree, wood by wood, landscape by landscape,—
—they stand in their glory—

‘The death-flushed trees, that in the falling year,
As the Assyrian monarch, clothe themselves
In their most gorgeous pageantry, to die.’

Then the first frosts, and the calm clear mornings, and the grey fresh blue of the evenings with their sprinkling of intensely, piercingly, glittering stars. And then the deep spell is broken which seemed to bind the trees, and we stand and watch while, now in a shower and now singly,

‘The calm leaves float
Each to his rest beneath their parent shade,’

and the year seems just passing away as a beautiful dissolving view.

There is also something to keep up spin of blood, something of excitement, and stir, and glow, in the brave October days, when a great wind comes roaring and booming over the land, and you see the tall ash trees toss up their wild arms in

dismay, and a deep roar gathers in the elms, and a far hissing in the pines, and from that beech avenue, rich, as misers are, in tarnished gold,

‘—Piece after piece

The spendthrift Autumn scatters Summer’s hoards.’

On such a day you can walk out, and press your hat well to your head, and button your coat, and labour up the rising downs, yielding no foot to the blustering screaming wind. And a glow and an exhilaration tingles in your veins as you press on, with pace no whit slackened for all its vehement opposition.

But November has come; and the calm quiet hectic of September, and the hale vigour of October, have now passed away. The rain has sodden and struck down leaf after leaf, heaping the roadside, until you might count the yellow leaves left upon black twigs of the trees that edge the lanes. A sense of bareness and desolation oppresses you, and an aspect of dreariness and moist death has stolen over the landscape. You walk into the garden: the dahlias are blackened with the frosts of October; the pinched geraniums, verbenas, heliotropes, lie wrecked on the beds; the few straggling chrysanthemums that remain, and the scattered Michaelmas daisies—these are not enough to cheer you; nay, even these are drooping in the universal damp, and strung with trembling glittering diamonds of sorrowful tears. The dark sodden walnut-leaves thickly carpet the side paths, and the most cheerful thing in them is here and there the black wet walnut lying, with just a warm hint of the clean bright yellow shell within, shewn through a torn fibrous gap. Day after day the fog sleeps over the land, and you see your breath in the morning in the cold damp air.

You are brought face to face—earth stripped of its poetry and romance—face to face with Winter days.

And their approach seems gloomy. The light, and warmth, and the glory of the year have gone; but, as yet, the memory of them has not all quite departed. There are still the once gleeful leaves lying, poor dead things, in the lanes; there are



yet the unburied flowers, black on the garden-beds; the air is tepid; the trees are not entirely bare; the state is one of transition.

‘The year’s in the wane,
There is nothing adorning,
The night has no eve,
And the day has no morning;—
Cold Winter gives warning.’

Yes, the approach of Winter days seems gloomy. We have more in our thought the chill drear outside of Winter, than his warm comfortable heart, glowing as the centre of a burst pomegranate.

But November has now ended, and December has come. The early days of this month seem stragglers from that which has just gone out, and the same chill warm gloom prevails. There is a muggy closeness in the air; everything feels damp to the touch, and an oppressive scent of decay dwells in the gardens and in the fields. You seem to see low fevers brooding over the lanes and alleys of the city, and you apprehend that 'green Yule,' which 'makes a fat kirkyard.' Your spirits, if your temperament be such as that they are a little dependent on the weather, seem drooping and languid and foggy too. And in this mood it is that you determine to sally forth, after lunch, and to call for a friend, and to take a walk with him for a mile or two, with thick boots and trousers turned up, because of the drenched roads and the sticky fields. And you warm into a better mood with the walk and the talk, and make the mile or two, five or six miles; indeed the sun is setting, and a deepening dusk in the sky shows a pale star here and there, while you are yet a good space from home. A sort of clearness and freshness seems to have come into the air since you turned for your start homewards; and you notice as you walk on, the frosty glitter in the stars, and you perceive that the road is actually growing rough and hard under your feet; and you know that the road-side puddles are gathering a lace-work at their edge.

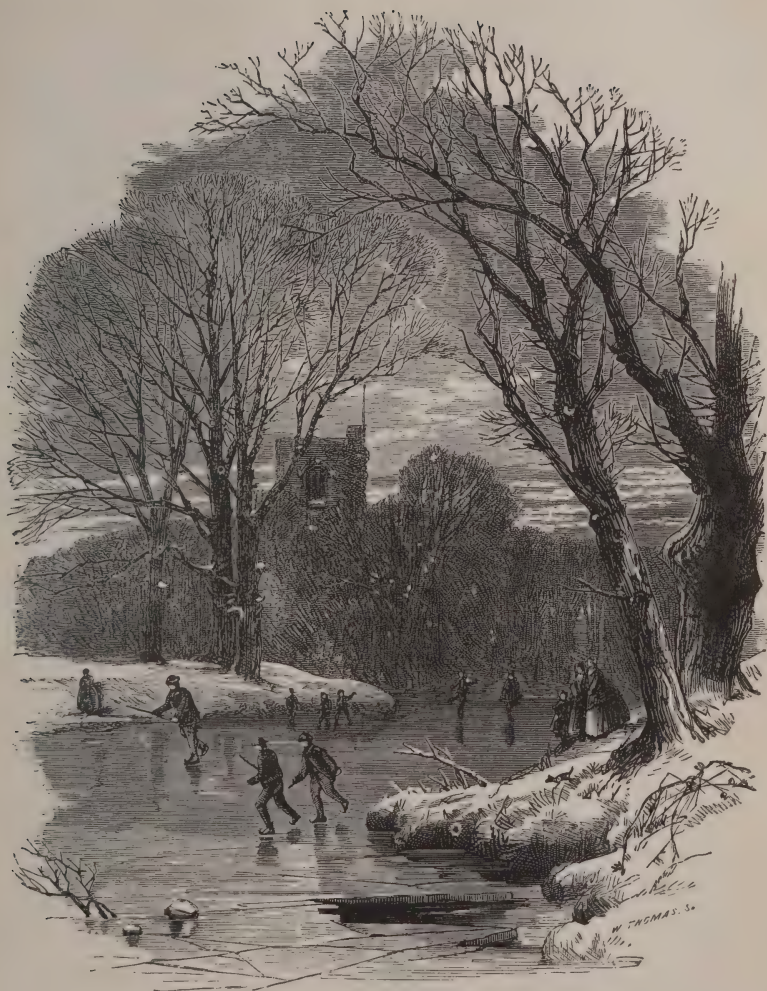
‘By the breath of God frost is given:
And the breadth of the waters is straitened.’

And so either ‘the hoary frost of heaven’ falls upon the earth, making a white feather of every straw, and a crisp fairy forest of the lawn, and a fernery of the windows, and hanging gardens of the spiders’ webs, and a wondrous dream-land of the asparagus bed, a mist of frail frosted silver, with a lovely scattering of red jewel fruit glowing among it here and there;—or a black frost descends on the lands and waters, holding them with a grip that grows closer, closer, and stiffens with more iron rigidity every day, until

‘The waters are hid as with a stone,
And the face of the deep is frozen.’

And the blood tingles in the veins, and life and health come back with sudden rush, and you leave who will to stay by the fire, while you start forth with swinging skates to do the next best thing to flying; having dined hastily at midday so as to have a long evening.

And one night you go to bed, leaving a yellow dun sky brooding over the hard fields. At a little before seven you rise, and drawing aside the blind with something of a shiver and a yawn, rub your eyes with amaze. In the half dark, you seem to look out, from your dim-lit room, upon one large Twelfthcake, with a mysterious figure here and there for an ornament. And when you put out your candle, and draw up the blind, how strange is the sight which greets you; how changed the appearance of every thing since last night! What a heavy fall of snow there has been; and how sudden,



and how silent! Against the slate sky a few dark flakes steal down, or a small drift dances, changing into a pearl-white as the atoms sink lower, and are seen against the black bare trees, or the full rich evergreens. You are fascinated; you *must* stand at the window and watch. That araucaria—how *can* its long dark arms hold such a piled sheer height of snow? How deep and dazzling it lies upon the window sill! what a broad sheet upon the roof of that barn! how of the thinnest twigs of the nut trees and the acacias each sustains his piled inch and a-half in the complete stillness! how the laurels bend down under great heavy loads of snow; and the erect holly shews, under its ermine, a prickly dark gleam, and a burning berry here and there! All the sad traces of the dead Summer are vanished, and the bustling birds chirp and huddle upon the anew foliaged branches, raining down a miniature snow-storm as they fidget about the trees. The sodden leaves, and the black flower-stalks, and the bare fields, are hidden now, and Autumn and Summer are dead and buried; and the Winter days are here in earnest. Ah, yes, the sadness was more in the transition time, and, now that that is over and the change made, did you not discover that—

‘Some beauty still was found; for, when the fogs had passed away, The wide lands came glittering forward in a fresh and strange array. Naked trees had got snow foliage, soft, and feathery, and bright, And the earth looked dressed for heaven, in its spiritual white.

Black and cold as iron armour lay the frozen lakes and streams; Round about the fenny plashes shone the long and pointed gleams Of the tall reeds, ice-encrusted; the old hollies, jewel-spread, Warmed the white, marmoreal chillness with an ardency of red:

‘Upon desolate morasses, stood the heron like a ghost,
Beneath the gliding shadows of the wild fowl’s noisy host;
And the bittern clamoured harshly from his nest among the sedge
Where the indistinct, dull moss had blurred the rugged water’s edge.’

But, O kindly companion, (I hear some one urge,) has not your pen wandered; and is not this appreciative description of God’s snow and frost mere secular writing? Dear Reader, let me meet your demurrer with a negative. A careful loving observer of God’s works, attains, by this cultivated faculty, the privilege of studying, as it were, a second volume of God’s word. And if you would have, from the sacred volume, warrant for such a method of writing, take it down and turn to the 104th Psalm. You will find, in that Psalm of Praise, God’s works abundantly brought in, and interwoven with God’s word, still further, as I may say, embellishing and beautifying the teaching; and illuminating the text with dainty initial letters and rare little gems of illustration. Here is a bird’s nest, you will find, swaying securely in the long flat arm of a Cedar; here a breadth of bright green grass, with cattle feeding upon it; here a tinkling spring, trickling down the hill side, whilst, as it sleeps in the valley, the beasts of the field gather about it, and the wild asses quench their thirst. The birds chirp and sing among the branches, the murmuring rain descends from the chambers of God upon the grateful hills and the satisfied earth; the tender grapes appear, and the ‘olive-hoary capes,’ and the wide waving fields of the deep golden grain. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats, and the conies stud the rocks here and there. There are moonlight scenes, and sunsets, and an Eastern night, with its great luminous stars,

and the deep roar of the lion creeping under the shadow of those tall silent palms. There is a field with labourers at work, coming out from their homes as the sun rises, and the beasts of prey slink back to theirs.

And there are sea pieces too; from contemplation of the land we are led on to the hoary wrinkled ocean, with its ships, and its monsters, and its innumerable population, all gathering their meat from God. And in other psalms, and in many another part of the Bible, we find thus God's word studded with illustrations from God's works. In the 147th Psalm, for instance, there is something to our present purpose:

‘He sendeth forth His commandment upon earth:

His word runneth very swiftly.

He giveth snow like wool: He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes.

He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before His cold?’

Further, who will not recall our Saviour's teaching, so interwoven with pictures from the wonders of beauty and design which, the clue having been once given, bring to us, through Nature, lessons about God. ‘*Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.*’ ‘*Behold the fowls of the air.*’ Then the corn-field, the vineyard, the fig-tree, the fall of the sparrows, the red evening and the red morning sky,—these are all enlisted to illustrate the teaching of our dear and gracious Lord. And St. Paul, foreshadowing the manner of the resurrection, and the change of the psychic into the spiritual body, what does he but use the image of the seed sown in the plough-lands, and rising again with the new and glorious body which God gives it, as it pleaseth Him?

Religion, in truth, is too much thought of as 'a star that dwells apart,' and is not enough one with our common life: not as the daisy by our hedgerows, or the rose in our gardens, as well as the light in our sky. It should not be a mere Sunday garb, to be wrapped up and put away in a drawer till Sunday comes again; if we understand its use aright, it will serve for our holiday dress and our every-day dress too; and no need is there to fear lest we should make it shabby, or should wear it out. The world may look on it as a restraint, a thing to be, on special occasions, *put on*, and not our common apparel; or it may think of it as a light which has now and then to be lit, perhaps with a great deal of ostentation in striking the match; or as a moon easily forgone when the sun is shining, and only useful in the night of sorrow. But we should learn to make it a light ever at hand, and ever in use: with us it should be our sunshine and our moonlight too: and of its kindly radiance it should ever be truly said, that—

‘—Close to us it gleams,
Its soothing lustre streams
Around our *Home's* green walls, and on our Churchway path.’

Let, however, these thoughts on Nature really lead on to thoughts of God; else we do but look at the type, but are not reading the book. Thus, underlying these stray jottings on Winter days, there lurks a moral, and a deeper meaning. For it struck me that, taking the reader's arm, and walking out for a walk into the frosty air upon which we entered through the vista of November, I might shew, perhaps, from one or two points of view, the cheeriness and the calm, and the

deep heart of peace, that underlies all even of the sadness that God sends. There is a bitter kernel to all the sorrows that we wilfully or waywardly bring on ourselves—the kernel of remorse and unavailing regret. But there is a sweet kernel, believe me, to all the bitter-cased walnuts which fall, naturally, straight down from God's trees. There is use, yea, also



beauty, in His dying fields and His shrouded earth; in His mists of November, and in His sleep of the World, in Winter days.

Let us gather a thought here and there from the clusters that seem to come up, as Christmas roses, from the bare beds of Winter days.

The life of man has its November time; a time of sheer,

literal, melancholy decay; no romantic flush, this, of Autumn woods, frecking them with a thousand delicate fancies and poetic hues, and crowning death with an intense, fascinating, dreamy glory. The wild abundant Spring blossom-promise is over long ago; the achievements of Summer, sobered though they were, have passed away, and the tinge of pleasant dreamy melancholy that touched their first decay has died out; and the heart sinks as we look around us.

‘That time of life thou dost in me behold,
When yellow leaves, or few or none, do hang
Upon the boughs that shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.’

The ageing man looks back upon his past life, and on all the works that his hands have wrought, and on the labour that he has laboured to do; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun. What we meant to be, and what we are! The bright, soaring, heaven-imaging bubbles that gleamed before our eyes, and the little ruin of soapsuds, sinking into the ground here and there! The crowding, the rush, that our boyhood knew, of vivid pushing buds; and now the bare, poor black twigs and branches, that drip above the yellow stained heaps below! Hopes, ambitious, dreams, loves, friendships, aspirations, yearnings, plans, resolves, scattered and lying, trodden under foot, about the lanes of our life, or here and there heaped, in a mass, at some well-remembered turn or corner, dead, and sodden, and desolate exceedingly.

‘Oh! ’tis sad to lie and reckon
All the days of faded youth,
All the vows that we believed in,
All the words we spoke in truth.’

Well, and may the analogy be continued further? Can there be a December to follow upon and to beautify those sad November hours? I think so. Sometimes it is just when the leaves are all fallen, and the flowers all dead, and the fruits only represented by a straggler lying here and there, and when the bare boughs are strung with trembling tears that gleam with a dull light in the heavy enfolding mist; sometimes it is even then that a wondrous work is secretly being wrought. A pinching frost comes with, as it seems, the finishing stroke, and the last sere leaf circles down, and even the fading chrysanthemums blacken, and the little robin lies dead on the iron border. The landscape of your life seems dreary indeed; a dim sky overglooms all, and you go your sad way from the scene as night deepens over it. But God wakens you, as it were, some morning, and bids you look out of the dim-lit room in which your heart was shut; and lo! a strange transformation! His consolations, and His teaching of the deep meaning of things, have descended profuse and abundant from above, and even earth's ruins and desolations are glorified and transfigured by the beauty of that heavenly snow. You are content now that the earthly foliage should have made way for and given place to that unearthly glory which reclothes earth's bare boughs; you can think calmly, quietly, without any intolerable anguish, of those desolate leaves, and stained flowers, and the frozen robin, that all sleep undisturbedly under the snow. God's snow, I think—the snow which He sends down upon hearts desolate and deserted,

‘That once were gay, and felt the Spring.’

God's quiet snow, I think, that succeeds all the Spring and Summer excitements and ecstasies and heats of life, is just that *peace of God which passeth all understanding*, sent down to keep our heart and mind, that its life be not destroyed nor its aspirations all cut off, but that it may be folded over, warm and safe, until the Resurrection. Until that Spring time, better than earth's Springs, seasons which do but bring to us, again and again, perishable buds and leaves. A Spring which shall know no November, no Winter days; a Spring which shall no doubt revive and recover every feeling, and thought, and love, and aspiration which was really God-given and beautiful, and shall make hopes, blighted here, bright there with the blossom of unearthly beauty, and shall bend the bare boughs of our unquiet unutterable yearnings low towards Him with the abundant fruit of satisfaction.

‘Brighter, fairer far than living,
With no trace of change or stain,
Robed in everlasting beauty,
Shall we see them once again.’

I think the contemplation a little way off, of any sorrow, and even of bereavement, bears out what has been said concerning the time of *anticipation* of Winter being really the worst and most cheerless time of all. A time when only the chill, and the death, and the dreariness is in our thoughts, and we do not suspect the strange beauties that will accompany the Winter of suffering, nor the warm glow that is hidden in its heart. We only see the trouble coming, and we know not, until the time of need is even with us, of the consolation, and the support,

and the adorning of spiritual loveliness that are coming too; coming with the silent step of the snow, or the unseen breath of the frost, to cast over thoughts, and feelings, and character, a fringe and foliage of heavenly beauty; coming with a glow of consolation, as Christmas in the heart of Winter—the glow of the warm fire of God's love, which can keep out earth's sharpest and most piercing cold. So that when the Winter has really come, and we look out on the soft snow of God's peace, and creep closer to the warmth of God's love, we find that even the sharpest Winter days are not so terrible as November painted them; and, revolving and realising their beauty and their use, we can enter into his feelings who said, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted;' and say 'Amen' with quiet grateful hearts to those once inexplicable words, 'Blessed are they that mourn.'

The thought of Winter days seems to lead us at once, by analogy, to thought of the Winter of Death drawing ever nearer to every one of us all, old men and maidens, young men and children. And indeed this approaching time, seen from the misty avenues of life's November, is apt to seem chill and cold to the mind and heart. Still, I am sure that death, since the Saviour died, and rose again, is not a time of absolute unlovely or un comforted gloom to the obedient and faithful child of God. Oh no! when that Winter has indeed come, such a one then perceives and realises in it a Christmas heart of warm comfort, and is aware of its unearthly frost work of strangesweet thoughts and teachings. To such a one, if gloomy, it is gloomy chiefly by anticipation, and while the traces of earth's Summer yet

linger, and the tears and regrets of earth are yet glittering on the empty trees, bare lands, and faded flowers. Only gloomy until God has finished weaning us, first by His chastenings, and then by His consolations.

How sad it is that, in our common ideas, and representations, and modes of speech, Death, even the good man's death—should be overshadowed with such unlit darkness! I remember a curious proof of this, if proof were needed.

In a small illustrated edition of Longfellow's poems, the artist has chosen for illustration those sweet verses, 'The Reaper and the Flowers.' You remember these graceful lines :—

'He gazed at the flowers with tearful eyes,
He kissed their drooping leaves;
It was for the Lord of Paradise
He bound them in his sheaves.

"My Lord hath need of these flow'rets gay,"
The Reaper said, and smiled;
"Dear tokens of the earth are they,
Where He was once a Child."

And how do you think the artist has represented that gentle Angel-Reaper? Actually as a gaunt Skeleton with a lank scythe! So ingrained, in the common thought of men, is that ghastly and loathsome idea of death. Then think further of all the impenetrable gloom with which, as a rule, we surround death, in this Christian England, in this nineteenth century; of the utter absence, from our obsequies, of hope or beauty (save for the glorious pæan of the service). Listen, as soon as the happy, hopeful Christian has 'fallen asleep,' to

the manner in which we tell the news to the wider family of our village or town. Drop, drop, like melted lead falling, for a whole hour sometimes, comes that dull monotony of gloom, TOLL,—TOLL,—TOLL,—till the heart of those who hear it dies down into depression for the day.



Were it not that we know that this recurring note comes from the belfry of the peaceful little church that presides hopefully and holily over its gathering of sleepers—were it not for this, would there, I ask, be any thought but of dreariness, in the monotony of that dull ceaseless repetition of the toll of the ‘passing bell’?

‘In the silence of the night,
How we shiver with affright
At the melancholy menace of their tone;
For every sound that floats
From the rust within their throats,
Is a groan.’

Death is, indeed, always a grave and solemn thing, and it were well that a grave and solemn voice should announce its presence to the clustered or the scattered homes. But why change solemnity into despair? Why fill the air with naught but heavy gloom for a whole hour or half-hour? I would not say, in the words of Poe:—

‘Avaunt! to-night my heart is light, no dirge will I upraise,
But waft the angel on her flight with a pæan of old days!
Let *no* bell toll! lest her sweet soul, amid its hallowed mirth,
Should catch the note as it doth float up from the weeping earth.’

For there *must* be sadness here, if there be joy where the spirit has gone. Only let not the darkness of the cloud be debarred from any the least silver lining. Something gentle, tender, and sweet, in accordance, so far as earth’s lamenting can accord, with the glory and rapture of the released one, would surely be better for the living than that slow prolonged numbering the beads of their own sorrow. I would have the bells,—muffled, if you please,—rung, as for a wedding; only with a minute’s interval between each note. So the joy and the sorrow would each be represented.

The early Christians used to speak of the day of death and commemorate it, as ‘τὰ γενέθλια,’ the birthday feast of those who fell asleep in Christ. What a different way of putting

things from our compassionate mention—not of the surviving, but of the departed. *Poor so-and-so! How sad!*—this, for the spirit that we feel a good hope, is resting in Paradise! How the having it put before you in the just view—rather as an initiation into true life, than a dying from it, casts a glow on what most seem to regard as nought but gloom. I find in one of Archbishop Leighton's heavenly letters, a most exquisite instance of such a beautiful putting of such a sharp Winter day to even a bereaved father and mother. In what a tender light must their loss, surely, have appeared to them, after its perusal.

‘Indeed,’ he writes, ‘it was a sharp stroke of a pen, that told me your pretty Johnny was dead: and I felt it truly more than, to my remembrance, I did the death of any child in my lifetime. Sweet thing! and is he so quickly *laid to sleep?* *Happy he!* Though we shall have no more the pleasure of his lisping and laughing, he shall have no more the pain of crying, nor of being sick, nor of dying; and hath wholly escaped the trouble of schooling, and all other sufferings of boys, and the riper and deeper griefs of riper years, this poor life being all along but a linked chain of many sorrows and many deaths. Tell my dear sister she is now much more akin to the other world; and this will quickly be passed to us all. *John is but gone an hour or two sooner to bed, as children used to do, and we are undressing to follow.*’

In another letter the same writer says of himself—

‘I am grown exceedingly uneasy in writing and speaking, yea, almost in thinking, when I reflect how cloudy our clearest thoughts are; but, I think again what other can

we do, till the day break and the shadows flee away? As one that lieth awake in the night must be thinking; and one thought that will likely oftenest return, when by all other thoughts he finds little relief, is, *when will it be day?*

You see he would have wondered to be spoken of thus—‘Poor Archbishop Leighton has gone.’ Answer,—‘How very sad,’—when at last he had attained to the dawn of that day.

Let me shew, by another noble instance, that as Winter days, when they come, bring often unforeseen beauty and gladness with them, so, to the eye of exalted faith, not even the anticipation is always necessarily sad. Remember you those words of the mighty Apostle of Christ—when the Winter time was yet somewhat in the distance—with their more than calm anticipation of it, their deep warmth of joy?

‘To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. What I shall choose I wot not.

For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; *which is far better.*’

And then the stirring tones of exultation and triumph, as now but few leaves were left, and Winter days were even at the door.

‘I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.’

Here is an Aurora borealis flashing up to the heavens, in light and splendour, over the wide snow landscape of Winter days.

THE END OF THE SEASONS.

THE saints that are scattered abroad! How scattered they are 'in the dark and cloudy day.' The good, the true, the just, the kind, who despite present appearances, shall yet 'multiply, replenish the earth, and subdue it,' for the Lord their God, how many they are in out-of-the-way places!—Saintly souls, with far inferior advantages for training than many of us have had! obscure persons, possessing marvellous insight of Holy Scripture, who seem to have had no human teacher; hidden ones, with an instinctive knowledge of what is right, who never had a mortal director; people far removed from a House of God, yet loving the habitations of that House: Christians to whose threshold a fellow Christian seldom finds his way, whose hearts bear before God 'all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;' ay, it may be, praying souls, in some locality where the voices of blasphemy are chiefly heard; praising souls, in some neighbourhood which echoes with the voices of mutual malediction. Such are some of the strangers scattered abroad; Christ's quiet missionaries, God's secret witnesses.

A. B. EVANS.



THE Summer is past, the Autumn is
passing quite away, the Harvest is
long ended, the fruit all garnered.

And the year seems as desolate as Solomon in his sad time, having erst been clad in more than all his glory. It has gathered gardens, and orchards, and pools, and singers, and delights; and whatsoever its eyes desired it kept not from them, nor withheld its heart from any gladness or beauty; and it rejoiced in all its labour. But now what a change! You may fancy that it has looked on all the works that it had wrought, and on the labour that it had laboured to do,—and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun! And so it hastens to cast away all its gathered store and cherished delights, and stands naked,

desolate, bankrupt, under the cold, searching gaze of the clear bright stars. Yes,

‘Where is the pride of Summer, the green prime,—
The many, many leaves all twinkling? Three
On the mossed elm; three on the naked lime,
Trembling,—and one upon the old oak tree!’

That work of God to which, in our common speech, we give quasi personality, as ‘Nature,’ is always beautiful to those who always look for beauty in her. But perhaps she is *least* lovely when clad in a close thick fog. And it is thus that we have seen her continually of late. The wet black trees stood dim and ghostlike in the mist, and much, in appearance, like seaweed under tissue-paper. The hedges looked unreal and distant, as you passed between them on the pale road. Passengers and carriages loomed blurred and big and indistinct, out of the chill cloud in front of you, long after the wheels and the steps had been heard. Dull unglittering dew strung the branches that stretched over you, and gave a blunt light here and there in the hedge. You were isolated from your kind; scarce could you see one approaching until he was close upon you; and then, a few steps, and he was straightway swallowed up. It is not a fading morning mist, this of which we speak now; but a good November fog, one developing from cold blue to grey, and thence to yellow, and so on to tawny dun. Homeward-bound, you emerge from it into the railway-station. The train is late; the fire is pleasant; and you muse or doze away half-an-hour by the waiting room fire. Presently a red spot dies part of the mist; a behemoth mass is perceivable beside the platform; you get into a carriage, the

whistle shrills, the train moves, and the station lights are gone in a minute,—and you also are swallowed up in the fog.

And as you pass, up the garden, home,—the chance is that you hurry on, where, at a more propitious time, you would have paused to admire beauty. In the cold fog, the orange-fruited asparagus, hung with leaden mist drops that chilly gleam here and there, bends and falls about its mounded bed: a black, wet, sere leaf or two clings to the ragged black sticks against the apricot wall; the acacias drop pattering drops upon the broad fallen sycamore leaves: you might as well walk through water, as cross that lawn for a short cut to the warm mellow room, at whose window, which opens to the ground, stands she who chiefly makes that house, home. You are not sorry to shut the windows, and to have the curtains drawn, and to let the earth stand without, like a shrouded ghost, clad in winding-sheet of fog, while you enjoy the genial blaze, the cosy meal, the little ones on your lap after dinner, the gentle wifely smile that loves to see these loved.

Well, I contend that there is beauty even in the fog; but I will not stop to prove this now. I will only say that there is *less* beauty in this than in most other aspects of nature, and much excuse for the connecting the foggy bare time of year with chill and dreary thoughts. Then, growth of flower and fruit seems suspended, save for a scarlet splash on the hedge here and there; and dead-fingered fungi crowd in bunches above the graves of the flowers, and at the roots of the desolate trees.

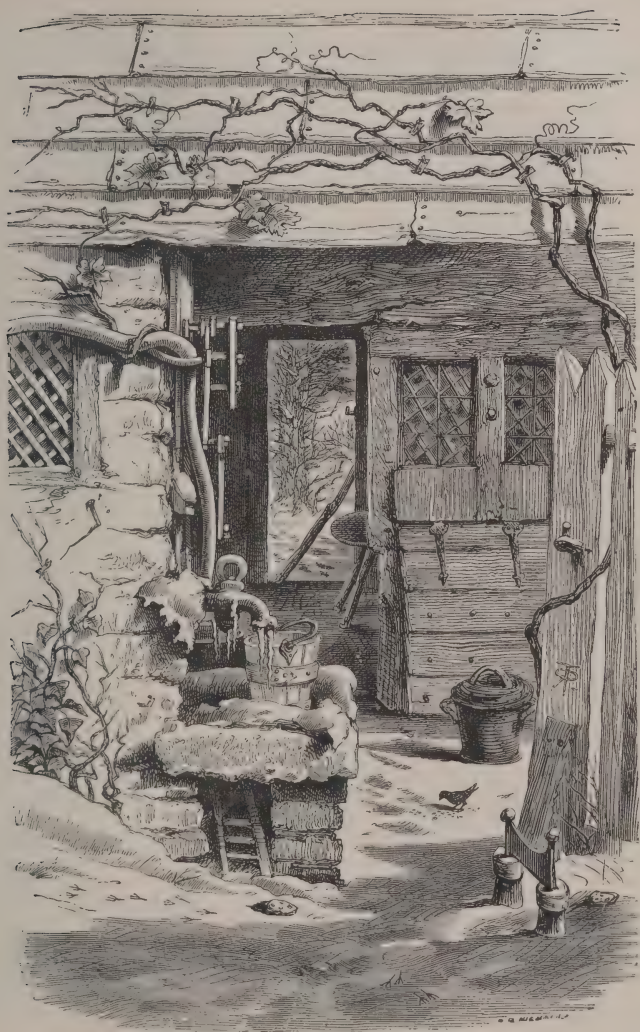
The fields are bare, with no coming crops; only swart and self-satisfied pigs roam in herds over them: the grass has

stopped growing; there is neither blossom nor fruit, nor are there leaves upon the trees; the well-woven birds' nests are empty and sodden; hope and fulfilment seem alike departed, and death seems to reign in solitary gloom over the pale and shrouded land. Is not all this sad beyond tears?

No; we are sure that, in the year, this is not sad, really; for that Memory and Hope are alike supporting its aged steps, as it totters into December. The *hope* is to be found in every twig, as well as in the broad, brown lands that are beginning to be ruled, as it were, in music lines of thin emerald. The *memory* suggests by analogy, and in a sweet figure, those words that have comforted many a mourner,—

‘I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.’

It is not sad, really, to see the year in its bareness and barrenness! lonely winds searching over the cornless uplands, and sighing amid the stripped boughs; dull fogs brooding over the damp fields, and shrouding the universal desolation and decay. No; because the fruits *have been*, and are garnered in. It is not that the year's work has been left, until too late, to do. It is only that *it is done*. The contemplation of the end of the seasons is not sad, really; for when we walk through the dull bare fields, that once moved with millions of stalks and one whisper, we think of the heaped, massed grain, or of the crumbling white flour, or of the tawny square loaves. Or if we miss the dancing grass and the bobbing clover, we look at the goodly camps of close-ricked hay, under the peaked



roofs of straw. And walking through the garden or the orchard, if for a moment we are chilled by the bare look of the pitiful cold boughs, black, and ragged, and starred with tears, our thought flies from these to the bright, polished, red or white cherries, and the dark blue-bloomed damsons, and the ruddy plums, and the yellow pears, and the grey greengages, and the dead-orange apricots, and the smooth nectarines, and the velvety, crimson-hearted peaches,—all of which were, in their turn, yielded faithfully by those desolate branches, and enjoyed by us. Ay, and we think with double satisfaction of a store yet left; of the salvage of apples and freckled pears, sorted, wiped, and laid by in rows—brown-yellow nonpareils, streaked ribstones, mellow Blenheim oranges, and russets, betraying a gleam of gold just where the brown has rubbed. We may, perhaps, think—but this is a heartening contemplation,—how different things would be with the year, were all this otherwise, and had the Spring, and Summer, and Autumn been squandered in merely making evanescent wreaths of dying flowers, that perished at the chill breath of the fogs and inexorable frosts.

At this conclusion, then, our sober thought arrives. But still, to our fancy, the year seems desolate, forlorn, and sad; the fog embodies a chill and heavy depression; the rain sobs out its heart in tears; the wind—

‘Like a broken worldling wails,
And the flying gold of the ruined woodland drives through the air.’

In poetry, and even in prose, we do not most readily think of the year, between November and Christmas, as asleep after work done, but as stagnant, and brooding in despair over a wasted life and lost opportunities, and hopes withered

and gone by. Why does this association of ideas arise most naturally to our mind? for no such thought would trouble that of a contemplating angel.

Well, the truth is, that *we* look through coloured glass, tinting, to the mind's eye, with a hue of sadness, things not really sad. We see the leaves circle down, and straightway are reminded that—

‘We all do fade as a leaf.’

We see the mists gather and the rain descend,—and no one but can recall heavy mists of sorrow that rose drearily over the heart's landscape, and glooming clouds that gathered, and burst in bitter tears. And the wind gets its November wail as it passes through our heart, and not from the bare boughs of the well-watered and resting trees. And we choose to represent the year as thoughtlessly glad and wastefully profuse in its lost seasons, and as *now* broken-hearted and despairing; because this is so common a case, if not in our own experience, yet in the history of so very many about us. We cannot but think how this idle busy-ness and succeeding ruin is indeed to be found too often, too often, in the year of man's life. Flowers, when he is young; flowers, in life's prime; flowers, in its Autumn; and what will ye do in the end thereof? What, when the fogs and the frosts have come, and the evils days are close at hand, and the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them? Where is the secure store, the treasure laid up in the safe garner, to cheer the heart, when the sap has gone down for this year, and the fields are blank, and growth is stayed?

How foolish, we can see and should readily acknowledge; how unpardonably shortsighted it would be of the Year to postpone until the dark, short, chill days towards its end, its work of preparing, maturing, ripening its fruits. 'Nay, young Spring is but just here; it is the sweet pleasure time, the Spring; wait for Summer, I will then begin. Summer, with its thick leaves and hazy blue—who would begin at such a time as this to work? Autumn—let me enjoy the cool bracing air after Summer's heat; soon, really, a start shall be made.' And so November comes—and all the year's harvest, and all the year's fruits to be begun, grown, matured, all the year's work crowded into the last thin group of dwindling days. Desolate, indeed, would the year be then, and a wild wail of 'Too late!' would sweep with a shiver over the dreary land; no sunshine now, no time, no opportunity, no inclination, no power. The sap would be sluggish, the impulse of growth gone by; and at last a stolid, hard frost of indifference and fixed sterility close the sad story of the year.

All this may be fanciful—yet, brothers and sisters mine, that which is fanciful concerning the year of Nature, which ever does God's work faithfully, even while it enjoys His glad sun and refreshing rain, and smiles up to Him in flowers—that which is fanciful applied to the life of the Year, is too often gravely, heart-touchingly true of the life of Man. Nature,

'True to her trust, tree, herb, or reed,
She renders for each scattered seed,
And to her Lord with duteous heed
Gives large increase:
Thus year by year she works unfee'd,
And will not cease.'

But how do *we*, many among us, look at this life, this brief life which God has given to each—a life which has so many close analogies with Nature's year? For what purpose is our short year of Time given to us? To trifle away? Or to use in God's service in preparing fruit for eternity—wheat that shall be gathered into God's barn? For the latter, we shall own; and happy, if not our lips only, but our life gives this answer, too!

But how many, owning with their words the truth of this grave view of life, deny it with their deeds! Yet a little longer trifling—there is time enough. It is now the time for enjoyment—the time for work will come. Vain to answer,

‘But if indeed with reckless faith,
We trust the flattering voice,
Which whispers, “Take thy fill ere death,
Indulge thee, and rejoice,”

‘Too surely, every setting day,
Some lost delight we mourn,
The flowers all die along our way,
Till we, too, die forlorn,’

and there is found, then, indeed, in life's ending days, an unredeemed bareness and desolation, void of the glow of memory or hope. Vain to urge this: even if the admonition calls up a grave look for a while, the thought is soon shelved till an ever future ‘convenient season.’ And the life, if not the lips, of many proclaims—Let the world have my Spring, Summer, Autumn; and, after that, I have no fear but that a good crop of holiness and heavenly-mindedness will yet be found in the thin last sere days of Life's year. Let the world have the best of the year; we fully intend to spare its fragments and leavings for

God. To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, and Spring goes, and Summer passes, and Autumn dwindles, and the foolish heart begins to discover that it is now too late. For its life is chilled, its sap gone down, its fertility exhausted. It is not the time for blossoms now, nor for fruit; habits are fixed, and effort is paralysed; often ugly fungi have sprung from the ruins of comparatively innocent thoughtless delights. And this was not foreseen, nor will men believe it, although they be sadly warned of it. We read it from the Bible, we cry it from the pulpit—the reminding word of the truest Friend and Guide:—

‘They that seek Me early shall find Me.’

‘Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,
While the evil days come not,
Nor the years draw nigh,
When thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.’

‘To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.’

But young and old listen, and then go home to this and that distraction, and to unwatched hours; and other talk, and other interests, and other thoughts, dry up the dew that had rested upon the heart’s dryness awhile, but had not sunk in. God’s Spirit could have drawn it in, but His help was not heartily asked, even if asked at all.

Yes, is it not true, as one writes, that ‘men are ever beguiling themselves with the dream that they shall one day be what they are not now; they balance their present consciousness of a low worldly life, and of a mind heavy and dull to spiritual things, with the lazy thought that

some day God will bring home to them in power the realities of faith in Christ. Who is there that has not at some time secretly indulged this soothing flattery, that the staid gravity of age, when youth is quelled, or the leisure of retirement, when the fret of busy life is over, or, it may be, the inevitable pains and griefs which are man's inheritance, shall break up in his heart the now-sealed fountains of repentance, and make, at last, his religion a reality? So men dream away their lives in pleasure, sloth, trade or study. Who has not allayed the uneasy consciousness of a meagre religion, with the hope of a future change? Who has not been thus mocked by the enemy of man? Who has not listened, all too readily, to him who would cheat us of the hour that is, and of all the spiritual earnings which faith makes day by day in God's service, stealing from us the present hour, and leaving us a lie in exchange? And yet, this present hour is all we have. To-morrow must be to-day before we can use it; and day after day we squander in the hope of a to-morrow; but to-morrow shall be stolen away too, as to-day and yesterday. God's kingdom was very nigh to him who trembled at the judgment to come. Felix trembled once; we nowhere read that he trembled again.'

Habits are stronger when we are weaker. People forget this, and imagine that they can, at will cast off fetters that have grown from silken to iron, and that with force that has dwindled from vigour to impotence. That they can lie fallow all the growing time of life, and press clearing, ploughing, sowing, growth, harvest, all into the dark, few, shortening days of life's decay. 'A convenient season!' Ah! does

this mean, then, *the end of the seasons*—the meagre leavings of life's waning year. Is *this* the season 'convenient' for God's work—for the great purpose of our being? Is spiritual life likely to be then first lifting up its head, when all life is fading away?

'Gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost.' This is a command sweetly applicable to the gleanings of an old age, whose harvest has been given to God:

'They shall still bring forth fruit in old age';

—not their's the old age of the year—for the fruit of this, at the best is hips and haws, sour sloes, and holly-berries.

But can the command ever apply to a life of which the world, and the flesh, and the devil have had the harvest? Will God accept the mere gleanings?

'Autumn departs—from busy fields no more
Come rural sounds, our kindred banks to cheer;
Blent with the stream, and gale that wafts it o'er,
No more the distant reaper's mirth we hear.
The last blithe shout hath died upon the ear,
And harvest-home hath hushed the clanging wain:
On the waste hill no forms of life appear,
Save where, sad laggard of the Autumnal train,
Some age-struck wanderer gleans few ears of scattered grain.'

Thus, when the world's shouts and mirth have passed by him, may we sometimes see the sad late seeker of God occupied. Sometimes, not often; for be it well laid to heart that God's enemies seldom leave any gleanings on their fields, but are busy with careful rake to collect for their use even life's last days. Not often; for settled habits are hardest to overcome;

and when the character and tastes are formed, there will seldom remain even the hearty *wish* to alter. Not often, then, but *sometimes*, in later life the worldling, or the devil's labourer, turns back, with tears and wrung hands—smitten and pricked to the heart by some sharp voice from God—and wanders carefully over the bare, desolate fields in life's chill and fog, and shakes the trailing and drenched branches;—if perhaps there may be a little handful of corn, or an overlooked grape, or any fruit, that yet may be tremblingly offered to the Master of the Harvest, when He comes to take account with His labourers.

And now the question is, Is this late labour, labour in vain?

‘ Will God indeed with fragments bear,
Snatched late from the decaying year?
Or can the Saviour's blood endear
The dregs of a polluted life? ’

He will. It can. If the heart be *truly* turned to Him at last, it will not be turned to Him in vain. Many of my readers will recall a beautiful allegory of how certain servants were sent to trade in a great City for their lord, and how one, caused, late in the waning day, to tremble and to turn, but awakened from his recklessness too late to buy costly merchandise, brought at the reckoning-day rough sackcloth and salt tears, that, as he bore them to the throne, changed into rich stuff and rare jewels. Aye, a really broken and contrite heart, at *no* time in life will He despise. Best to give the harvest, and not only the gleanings, but better even these than no offering at all.

It is a humbling truth that men often only desert the world when the world deserts them. But, I have seen it observed, when men thus find that they must turn to God at last, all without Him having disappointed, there is something unutterably touching in the fact that, if they truly turn, so gracious is He, so patient is His love, that He will deign to accept the world's leavings. That Pearl of parables, the story of the Prodigal son, assures us of the truth of this. When he had spent *all*, it was,—all his rich patrimony of young energies, aspirations, powers, feelings, hopes, and after he had even gone after swine's husks,—that his heart turned to his Father's love, and,—after he had spent all, the Father accepted the casket empty, save of repentance;—worthless, save that it was broken and shattered! When the seed-time, and the ripening-time, and the harvest-time had passed, the offering of bare November fields and stripped boughs was accepted, because over them had gathered the mournful mist of true penitence, and because they were thickly strung with abundance of sorrowful tears!

Oh, wonderful love, not of earth, but divine!—God deigns to prize earth's cast off devotion! Therefore let those who seem now even settled on their lees, fixed in the ways of the world or of sin, let them tremble exceedingly, but let them not despair. If they *will*, to find acceptance, they yet *may*. Let them cry to the Helper, let them retrace the path with tears, gleaming as they go a scattered rare grain here and there,—redeeming the time, although the evil days have come. There is One for whose perfect merits the harvest of the saint and the handful of the sinner shall alike find acceptance; and though the best way is to 'sin not,' nevertheless, 'if any man

sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.'

Let none presume, however; for the gleaner commonly goes the same way that the harvest has gone. And, moreover, that was a sad answer of the young profligate,—returned, repentant, to his Father's house, to die,—to that Father, anxiously bending over him, and questioning him, as he held the thin hand: 'Yes, Father, I am at peace, because I am forgiven. But I am not *happy*,—for I am going empty-handed to my God.'

And it were base indeed, designedly, to set apart only life's leavings for God's share. Oh, rather let those who can, give life's whole broad year to God!

Too late, too late! This, if the year had postponed its work, must be the sad burden of the wind's wailing over its desolate and weed strewn fields. But it is a thought to humble the heart, and to bring tears of shame and gratitude into the eyes, that no human life with which God's Spirit is still striving need take that bitter wail for its own. Too late to love God? Nay, be assured that, if it *be* love, it shall be as tenderly, gladly welcomed as the dawn of the lonely white Christmas rose on the bare Winter beds.

'For love too late can never glow;
The scattered fragments love can glean,
Refine the dregs, and yield us clean
To regions where one thought serene
Breathes sweeter than whole years of sacrifice below.'

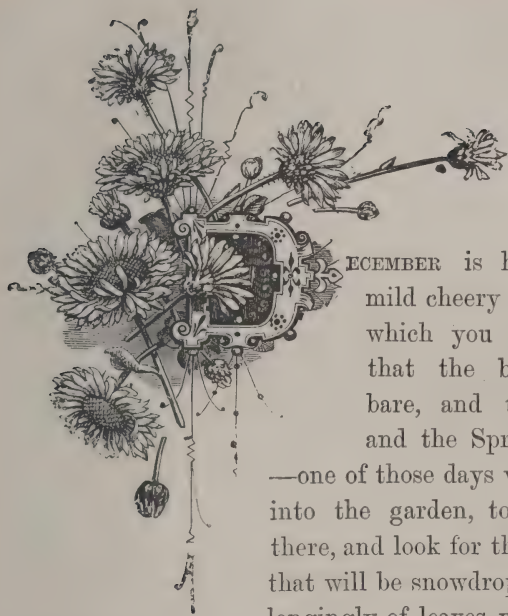
UNDER BARE BOUGHS.

SAY not, the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as have things have been, they remain.

If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke concealed,
Your comrades chase even now the fiers,
And, but for you, possess the field.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

A. H. CLOUGH.



DECEMBER is here—one of those mild cheery days, however, upon which you can hardly realise that the boughs are indeed bare, and the beds flowerless, and the Spring birds far away; —one of those days which tempt you out into the garden, to saunter and loiter there, and look for the dull green patches that will be snowdrops soon, and to think longingly of leaves where you had before

naturally and as of course acquiesced in the canopy of bare boughs;—a day on which you—at least *I*—do not care to go beyond the garden, for the day's meditative walk. To me a garden seems a peaceful, and far from gloomy, Churchyard. As a spire that tall, ancient, ivy-clothed spruce-fir stands out of the shrubbery; here, very near it, the gay laburnum tresses lie buried; here the pink apple-blossom long ago crumbled into dust; each round bed along the lawn is sacred to the memory of some choice rose; the violets sleep under that high wall—

the lilies, tall, white, stately, but dead and gone—claim remembrance from each side of the walk; the geraniums, verbenas, heliotropes, petunias, have their cemetery in those dark beds on the smooth sward, and each flower has some spot specially or generally consecrated to it.

The memory of my old friends and companions has a tender charm for me, and I look at the stripped rose-twigs, and at the brown mould where the flowers were, with a faint outer halo of that feeling which is vivid at the heart, when we pace among the mounds that hide the dust of friends. There is promise everywhere, I know, and the naked twigs are studded with germs of future leaves, and there are next year's flowers sleeping at the heart of the rose. But just now I rather cling to any relic of the past, than care to look forward; and I hail this lingering arrested bud with the buff-yellow petals, or this half-shattered pure white blossom, as belonging to the sweet array of the dead flowers. True, I accept this cluster of the winter-cherry, leaning forward on to the path, an orange globe in a golden network; and the swelling buds of the Christmas rose,—as being a link between the past and the future. But my thoughts slant backwards now, as I look upon the setting sun of the year; nor am I, in this mood, regarding it from the point that there is for it a morrow, on which it will rise again all fresh and new. No, I am not now concerned with the lovely wealth of coming leaves and flowers, the new year's dower,—so soon all spent,—so soon all spent,—I am now of a mind to muse under the

‘Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.’

Let me take my seat under this network of sycamore and chestnut branches, while the faint patches of pale sunlight



move about me on the rank and drenched, yet ungrowing grass; let me take my seat under the bare boughs, while the brown, wet, marred leaves huddle by the side of the garden

bench, and under the barred plank that serves as my footstool. I dare say my old and unfailing friend will soon come and perch near me, his lover, and match the sad cheery gleams of sunlight with sad cheery gleams of song. Bird of the mild dark loving eye, and quick quiet motion, and olive plumage, and warm sienna-red breast, bird of the soft song,—passion now subdued to tenderness, hope that has sunk to patience, eagerness that is merged in tranquillity,—faithful bird, whose every tone and motion, familiar and loved, seems to fit the Winter heart as well as the Spring fancy,—those fervent, passionate songsters of the Spring, that now are flown, they never drowned to my ear thy quiet song of peace; no, not even in the days when the nightingale's thrilling notes made the world as it were full of the unsubstantial beauty of a dream. And so now I feel a sort of right to the calm and comfort of thy tranquil, unfailing utterance, when the evanescent dream has passed away, and the disenchanted world stands naked.

Thus, while you are young, O my friends, and all the boughs are clothed, and all the birds are singing, and your heart makes answer to the loveliness and the music,—do not disdain, then, to listen to and to heed that quieter voice which tells, in an undertone, very beautiful, if attended to, of the abiding love of God. Your heart, if you but knew it, cannot really afford to dispense with it even then, when all the woods are loud, ‘and all the trees are green.’ And if then you *did* hear and heed and love it, ah, how exquisite, how refreshing, how more than cheering the faithful notes appear, as you sit meditating under a pale winter sky, and looking at silent leafless

boughs—and the songster draws nearer to you then, finding you alone!

Well, let me, I say, sit me down on this garden seat, under these 'bare ruined choirs,' and hail the one little chorister, whose quiet, modest song ever seems to me to compensate, in some degree, for the absence of all the rest. The dewdrops twinkle about me in the drenched grass, groups of brown toadstools cluster here and there, and wax-white fungi straggle away in a broken line; there is a scarlet gleam of hips in the rose-bushes under the shubbery, and higher above them, of mountain-ash that the birds have spared. It is Winter, but nature has not forgotten to wreath some sprays of Christmas decoration about her bare pillars, and to twist them in devices about her arches, that run up around me into this groined roof above.

The first subject of our musing, under the bare boughs, would naturally be, I suppose, the leaves that once clad them. Ay, and this even if, under the full shading foliage, we never thought to give them an upward glance of gratitude, love, and admiration. But they are gone, and what was once taken as a matter of course is valued, now that it is missed. There is repining, often, because of the desolation of Winter, and this from those who did not consciously enjoy the Summer.

I cannot reproach myself on this score. I have loved and learnt by heart every shape and development of the foliage, from the first vivid light of eager green to the sombre sameness of summer dark, and then the rich variety of hue and tint that dispersed this;—all this growth and attainment,

and decay have I heedfully and affectionately noted, during the space which separated last year's bare boughs from these.

'A million emeralds break from the ruby-budded Lime.'

Yes, I saw that—and I watched the juicy foliage deepen into graver green, and the thin maize-coloured strips of flower chequer the darkening full mass, and change the picture into

'The Lime, a summer home of murmurous wings.'

Then those curved chestnut boughs near the grass—I detected the first fresh crumpled gleam, bursting from the brown glistening buds, until all over the tree, in full perfection,

'The budding twigs spread out their fan
To catch the breezy air.'

And so I watched them into milky spires, and swarthy green globes, that grew browner, and fell, and burst threefold, lying among the heaped leaves, such a picture; the prickly russet green, the white lining and bright nut!

The beech, changing the soft silky fledging of its boughs into hardier green foliage, and afterwards becoming a very mint, each branch

'All overlaid with patines of bright gold';

and then subsiding into a sparer dress of sienna brown:—also

'The pillared dusk of sounding sycamores.'

the brave oaks, soon passing out of their Chaucerian attire,

'Some, very red; and some, a glad light green,'

and now all gnarled and knotted, and only clutching still a wisp of pale dull dry leaves here and there:—all these,

be sure, have had their meed of attention and of regard from me. And so I sit under the bare boughs with no remorseful, if with some regretful, feelings. But still, I say, who can look up at the stripped branches in the Winter without sometimes giving fancy and memory liberty to clothe them again with the fair frail dreams and hopes and enjoyments that, though they were evanescent, yet were beautiful, and that though passing away with the Summer of Time, yet no doubt have influenced the Eternal growth of the Tree? Yes, sometimes it will be graceful, and, at least, not harmful, to let memory wander back into the days of childhood and of youth, and bid the frail and inexperienced foliage cover the branches again with that rich but short-lived beauty :

‘Old wishes, ghosts of broken plans,
And phantom hopes assemble ;
And that child’s heart within the man’s
Begins to move and tremble.’

Aye, there they are again, for a moment, shimmering in the sunlight and in the shade, ‘clapping their little hands in glee.’ But we start, and they are gone. And, instead, how clearly opens above us the blue Sky through the stripped boughs !

I remember, some time ago, sitting under some sycamore trees, near the sea-side. Of course those trees are all bare now, but the leaves were then at the fall. It was just at that time of the year when all the sweeping in the world will not keep the lawn tidy, and every gust littered it with the crisp, curled leaves. Amid this surely advancing decay

there was, however, a pathetic effort towards renovation and new life. The year could hardly yet quietly acquiesce in the truth that its once exuberant power of growth was over, and that it must give in to stagnation, soon to become decay. (The like of this we may trace in the fall of the human year: in the faded Beauty; in the worn-out Author and Wit. And there is always a sadness about the sight.) Under the nearly black leaves of my sycamores some very yellow-green leaves were clustering upon the lower shoots; a late frond or two bent timidly amid the burnt and battered growth of the fernery; autumn crocuses came, upon the rich moist beds, like ghosts, but fell prone with an overmastering weakness; one gleam of laburnum drooped, and two white clusters of pear-blossom tried to ignore the presence of the heavy-mellowing fruit; and some frail crumpled bramble-bloom appeared among the blackberries. Tenderest and most touching, but wildest and most abortive endeavour, a primrose, too pale even for that pale flower, started up here and there out of the long draggled, ragged leaves. I know that many days ago Winter must have frightened away all this frail gathering, the more easily and suddenly, because of their weakness and timidity. But at the time I took pleasure in watching, and moralising upon, the impotent yet pathetic struggle.

And then, I recall, I sat down under the trees, very much as I do now, and on a day much like to this. The flickering spots of faint sunlight moved slowly on the sward: the day was calm, after a wild windy Summer. It was cool, for Autumn, as this is warm for Winter, and so the two days were near akin, except for this one difference, that the leaves were mostly still upon the

trees. They had begun in good earnest to fall, but they were still left in considerable numbers upon the boughs. And I fell, after some unconscious watching these leaves, into a fit of musing upon them. There was a peculiarity about them all which caught my attention. Let me set down, under these bare boughs, some of my thoughts at that time. It can be done the less unkindly now that that generation of leaves has all, some weeks ago, fluttered away.

The peculiarity was this. The trees being within the scope of many contending and fierce and unremitting winds, there was not, upon any twig, that I could see, one single *perfect* leaf. Perhaps a young leaf, just then born, and to die almost as soon as born, might keep somewhat of its intended shape. But those that had endured the furious winds and the heat and the rain and the blights,—ah, how shattered and scarred and stained they were! Some marred out of any trace of the intention of their birth; rent and beaten into a sorry strip, hardly to be called a leaf at all. But even the best were defaced and disfigured, spotted and imperfect.

Now sentiment about these leaves would, obviously, be extremely ill-placed. But my thought traced, in these battered masses of the sycamore, a picture of this life of ours, until the trees almost became a mirror, in which I myself, with the myriad race of much-enduring men, seemed to be exactly reflected. *Not one* perfect leaf; many *so* shattered and stained and marred. So beaten out of that pattern to which God had designed them. Some with hardly the very least trace left of that Image in which mankind was at first moulded. Most

with little to remind us of it. But, saddest of all, it seemed to me, to be obliged to own that there was not one, not even the best, which would bear close inspection. Not one but, even if the outline were somewhat preserved, had yet some defacing scar or hole or crack ;—not one perfect, no, not one !

And so it is, that we are in truth fain to accept for our idea of a good man here, merely the man who is least defaced and disfigured. The wise among men, what is he, but only one not quite so foolish as most others. The kind, only one that is less often cruel. The dutiful, and obedient, only one, among the gross that are utterly careless, only one that is at least and at best most inadequately trying to fear God, and to regard man. How negative is most of our goodness : how negative the qualities whose possession inspires our fellow-men with admiration ! A good son, a good husband—this surely, when we consider the responsibilities involved in the very name, only means one who is not bad, undutiful, unjust, unkind. And yet who could lay claim to either title, nor exhibit some, yea many, flaws and spots ? And for positive goodness—well, if it were not for deceptive comparison with the utterly marred and ragged growth with which we are surrounded, there would be little fear, surely of any, such as are we, laying claim to the possession of that here. *Great and good men?*—Rent and shattered, rent and shattered ; and if in comparison with the shreds about us, we trace in ourselves some hint of the original shape, how often we must then think, ‘ I was more in shelter, lower down on the tree,’ and how little inclined shall we be, contemplating sadly, even thus, our own stains and clefts, to think superciliously and pharisaically of those mere strips

that, growing on the higher boughs, seemed the prey of every rough wind that blew.

‘Safe home, safe home in port!
Rent cordage, shattered deck,
Torn sails, provisions short,
And *only not a wreck.*’

This seems the most that the best can say. And that this is so, appears to me sad. God’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; and I puzzle about this long and universal history of so-esteemed successes which are but half-failures. Inveterate as is the evil of our nature, vast as has been its fall, yet I ask myself, is there any limit to the recruiting stores of God’s grace? And, with such an armoury, ought the fight to be so sorry, only just not a defeat? I know we cannot attain; I know that, in this state, perfection must fly before us, and ever elude our grasp. I know, by a guess, that the nearer, in the view of others, we seem to it, surely the farther, in our own view, we shall appear to be behind it, the more vainly striving after it. And I know, nevertheless, that the soul hungry and thirsty for righteousness shall have, even here, some daily bread, to satisfy just the most restless gnawing of its desire, and that hereafter it shall fully feast, and be satisfied, at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

But what distresses me is this: that even truly good men are often, if not always, so disappointing. You were awakened to the loveliness of Christianity; you were yearning for the sympathy which you looked to find in its professors; you sought one of those human ideals which seemed, to hope and fancy, sure to be embodiments of its loveliness

—and how often a chilling want of gentleness, or patience, or tenderness, closed up the heart's opening blossom! Or, carrying some opportunity for serving Christ in the person of a poor member of His Body, to one who, you felt sure, would, at least, meet you with kindness, if unfortunately other calls precluded aid: how often a cold manner or a chilling rebuff disappoints and damps you! There is frequently too much bloodless, abstract faith, where you expected warm human interest; and wounded and hurt and baffled, you betake yourself to the only perfect sympathy, that of God. There is hardness, where you had taken for granted Christ's tenderness would be found; there is bitterness, where you had counted upon Christ's badge of love (St. John xiii. 35); there is even pride, where you had never dreamed of finding anything but absolute humility. There is over-anxiety about worldly matters, where you had pictured a perfect, restful trust in God; carefulness and trouble about many things, where you had looked forward to seeing at last the calm sitting at the Saviour's feet. There is irritability, and fussiness at trifles, where you had dreamed that things of eternal moment would alone have greatly moved: there is, upon the whole, disappointment, where you had looked for the realisation of that Ideal which you had in mind, and after which you did not wonder to find your own weak self vainly toiling. The winds and the blights seem too much for poor human nature, that will not draw, as it might, upon Divine grace; and upon every branch that we examine, there is not a leaf that is not sadly marred and imperfect; no, not one.

I know this must be, in a measure, with our best efforts in this wingless, fallen state. I know that in the sight of God and of angels, yea, of our own selves, if we have at all really learned what goodness is, the best of us are but weak buffers of those waters of evil in which many around us are, scarce resistingly, drowning. Still, without taking an Angel's point of view, might not our light, at least before men, shine a little more brightly and steadily, and not be made up of mere alternations of spasmodic flares, and dimness or darkness? Must there be so many spots of inconsistency, so many rents of surely elementary and avoidable unloveliness; so many high places not taken away, even though God be served somewhat in His Temple; such marring flies making even genuine and precious ointment to stink?

Oh, I often think that in this world and in this our brief day, there lies a great opportunity unclaimed! When we see the powerful influence which even a broken and unequal attempt at real service, aye, even at fulfilling the mere elements of our duty to God and to man, exerts upon a world where it is the rare exception even to *attempt* earnestly, then I consider, what might not a perseverance beyond the first steps (and God's grace knows no stint), what might not a steady advance towards perfection work, in this sceptical, critical, anxious, weary world? This world narrowly watches for flaws in the lives of those who 'seem to be some what,' and, finding them, strengthens itself straightway in its carelessness and godlessness. But if compelled to acknowledge a reality, a fulfilment of those theories which it has come to consider as scarcely meant to be reduced, at any rate,

as quite impossible, to be reduced to human practice; if forced to acknowledge a sterling goodness, human and yet Divine, which stands the searching tests by which men try profession; it will then fall vanquished before it, and, in many things, surrender itself to the influence of a goodness alike strict, gracious, and glad. If the good man set sentinels at all sides of his life, and not only at one or two chosen posts; if he were constant in trimming his lamp, seeking and pouring in more oil; not letting any slovenly black fungus grow on the wick, and dim part of the flame—how much might a few such bright and steady lights do in reproving the darkness, and bringing out sister gleams! How might we, thus rebuked, instead of resting proud of our sickly glimmer, set to work in good earnest, with watchfulness and prayer, to mend the flame, until the noble rays of the lighthouse, and the clustering lesser lights that would gather about its foot, might lure some that were driven and tossed homelessly upon the treacherous, troubled seas. Now the lights often go out when they are most wanted, and the beacon is dark just at the critical moment when a despairing look was cast towards it; and so the dreary, hopeless course is renewed.

A perfect man,—where shall he be found? One kind and wise, patient and loving,—not one whose life shall make the worldling sore and resentful, but rather shall make him sad and longing,—not one who boasts to be a “man of prayer,” but forgets to be a man of love,—not one who makes Faith the cuckoo nestling that edges out Charity,—not one too much absorbed in devotion, and even divine and religious contemplation, to enter into the difficulties, and wants, and cries, and

doubts, and struggles of those yet on the plain beneath the mountain which he is ascending. One of a universal kindness,—of an always ready sympathy for any feeling which he perceives to be real, howsoever it find no echo in his own heart; one ever just, generous, forbearing, forgiving; ever ready to stop and to descend to raise the fallen; firm and fixed in principle, but tender and gentle in heart; speaking the truth, but speaking it still in love; severity against sin never swamping yearning for the sinner; never base or mean in things large or little; always ready to suppose the best of others; never vaunting, never puffed up; not easily provoked; thinking no evil; rejoicing with the joyful, weeping with the sad; hard only upon himself; bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things. Never giving others to understand that he has already attained, or is already perfect; not counting himself to have apprehended, but *pressing toward the mark*. Alas! it is true that men are mostly content with a very low standard, and if they seem to themselves and others to have attained that, easily rest there;—and behold, the great opportunity passes away ungrasped.

Torn leaves, tattered leaves, at best marred and imperfect, not one approaching perfection, not one without a flaw. Ah, yes, one,—and one only. How glorious the thought that in our dear and gracious Lord, born into the world, and taking our nature upon Him,—in Christ, the Seed of the woman,—this our poor human nature, tattered, torn and defaced, is exalted into absolute and eternal Perfection. All the fiercest storms and blights and heats attacked our nature in Him, but attacked it in vain. The most minute and scrutinising

examination can here detect no least speck, no swerving from the ideal of entire symmetry. In Him we see what we long, vainly long it seems, to be. In Him we see that towards which He would exalt us, if we will to be exalted,—that which we may in a sense attain, if we will to be perfected. And so at last we turn from sad contemplation of innumerable greater or less failures, and dwell restfully and hopefully upon the only all-sufficient and perfect One. To be like Him when He shall appear, how glorious the hope that He has given us! To awake thus in the Spring of the Next Year, and this in a Land where there is no blight, nor bitter cold, nor scorching heat, to mar that shape. Only let us remember, that having this hope, we should even now be purifying ourselves, even as He is pure.

But here a burst of little ones comes into the garden, anxious for my leave and help to cut boughs of the holly and the box to clothe the rooms for Christmas, and to divert, from warm-hearted home, thoughts of the bare boughs that stand without. And it is well that our musings should thus be interrupted, and should thus end. Among the bare branches of the saddest thought there may still be found, planted by God's love, our warm-berried evergreens, here and there. And all that tells here of Death and Winter, tells of that which is temporary and evanescent, now that the LIFE has come into the world. Even the cold stripped trees and the buried flowers,—there is hope in their death,—and how much are we better than they!

And thus, from the contemplation of the rending winds and stripping Winter here, the Poet whom I quoted above, carrying out his own simile, goes on to thought of that everlasting Spring:

‘Safe home, safe home in port!—
Rent cordage, shattered deck,
Torn sails, provisions short,
And only not a wreck.
*But, oh, the joy upon the shore,
To tell our voyage perils o’er!*

‘The prize, the prize secure!
The athlete nearly fell,
Bare all he could endure,
And bare not always well;
*But he may smile at troubles gone,
Who sets the victor garland on.’*

Well, I must muse no longer, I see, but give up myself to the will of the children. Come along, then, and let us make at this joyous season, all as bright and cheery as we may. Tall sprays of thick-berried holly; golden winter cherries, laurel, and yew, and box; ay, and if you will, Cyril shall climb the old mossy gnarled apple-tree, and bring down a branching bunch of that yellow-green, Druid-loved parasite, with pale opals for berries. In this happy time the children may well claim to have ‘their time to laugh,’ and to rejoice; and the elders may, with kindly geniality, look on, or join in it. Yes, we may say, ‘It is *meet* that we should make merry and be glad;—for this our earth was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.’

Laugh and be happy, therefore, at the Christmas time. Only in enjoying the holiday, let not its etymology and true meaning be lightly lost sight of. And remember that it is only the thought of the glad Spring of Eternity that can take away the sadness from the contemplation of Time's bare boughs.



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